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# MAGAZINE OF HORROR AND STRANGE STORIES

Volume 1

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, *Editor*

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## *Introduction*

Horror . . . strangeness . . . the bizarre . . . the gruesome . . . the frightening: these have all been the stuff of story-tellers from the earliest times. From the days when everyone really believed that when a tree fell on a man this was intentional; that frightful monsters lurked hungrily in the shadows; that the dead returned for vengeance or to prey upon the living; that mankind was the plaything of gods or titans who might be placated; that there were secrets which, if uncovered, would enable man to control all manner of animate and inanimate forces — at a price — from these dimly-remembered times, the tale of horror has been part of our heritage.

But horror alone palls, as does any other single ingredient. There followed the strange story, which might or might not include terror; there was the bizarre tale which might be shuddersome, though not to all fascinated hearers; there was the gruesome story which enabled the hearer to identify either with the perpetrator of outrage or the victim, as his inner needs dictated. As civilization increased human resources, pooling talents, discoveries, and memories, the scope of fiction broadened. Strangeness might become charming at times; the bizarre might take on aspects of wonder, without terror; the gruesome could tinge upon the comic. But, for the most part, the intent of such

stories remains serious — to communicate a genuine feeling of fear to the hearer, rather than to play a joke on the hearer.

Even if it were possible — and, of course it is not — we would not want to fill every issue of this magazine with stories, each one of which was guaranteed to leave you limp with terror and apprehension. We do hope, in each issue, to have at least one story which each separate reader will find truly horrifying — but it cannot be the same story for everybody. That would be possible only if the circle of readers were confined to people with the same tastes as the editor — and how dull such an operation would be, even if it were profitable financially!

No, we want to give you variety. We want to present you with some of the great classics which you may not have seen before, or which are available only to a relative few in out-of-print magazines and books. We want to resurrect some memorable stories by authors who wrote this sort of material for the old “pulp”, because they enjoyed writing it, for editors who were not afraid to take an occasional story which did not follow the traditional formulas of pulp fiction. Or, perhaps, to be more accurate, did not follow the hackneyed patterns of pulp fiction — for there are a few basic formulas for a good story which have to be observed, however they are varied in the process. We want to offer an opportunity to today’s writers, newcomers and old hand alike, to write the horror, strange, bizarre, etc., story they’d like to write — and never mind the so-called policy. Every magazine that is edited intelligently has a policy — but as a fine oldtime editor, F. Orlin Tremaine, once mentioned to me, the good editor is the one who knows the difference between a policy and a fence. And the good publisher is the one who permits an editor to make use of discrimination.

This first issue is a sample — a more or less comprehensive, but by no means an exhaustive sample of what we have in mind for you. Here is how we would describe the stories in this issue — but remember, this is only suggestive. You may see them quite differently, and we are especially interested in learning where your viewpoints differ from ours, as well as in hearing where you agree.

There is Long’s tale of a man’s attempt to master forces beyond his control; West’s story of human yearnings that have become warped to the point of gruesomeness; Chambers’ account of the fascination of evil and destructiveness, and the human feeling of helplessness before it.

There is Bierce's picture of primal fear and the belief that the dead live on in malignant forms; Hoch's exploration of a sadist's paradise; Wollheim's suggestion that ancient myths and traditional jingles conceal very unpleasant realities.

There is Wells' matter-of-fact examination of what a haunt might really be like; Silverberg's amusing account of the tribulations of Satan — it's always fascinating to read about how Old Scratch was frustrated in the end; Stamper's tale of the horrors that accompany the determination to attain and hold power at any price.

And, finally, there is Pollock's vivid vision of world's end, and Mark Twain's charming writeup of Indian legend, full of childlike — but not childish — wonder.

Had there been science fiction magazines in 1907, Pollock's story might well have appeared in one of them. Most science fiction is outside our orbit, but we have no "keep out" sign posted here, to flash before the eyes of the science fiction writer. Any science fiction story which exhales the elements we offer in this magazine will be considered gladly, and we are open to argument on any side of the question.

We are also open on the question of departments in future issues — a question which is always raised in magazines of this nature. Our aim is to bring you the best fare possible; we hope you will want to become associates by sharing your thoughts with us.

*Robert A. W. Lowndes*

# The Man With A Thousand Legs

by Frank Belknap Long

*In 1923, Edwin Baird brought forth the first magazine in America entirely to be devoted to stories of the bizarre and the unusual: WEIRD TALES. The contents ran the entire gamut of the eerie, from the traditional ghost story, through the tale of physical terror, the supernatural legend, to the "weird-scientific" which would later be dubbed "science fiction". A year later, Farnsworth Wright bought the magazine, and in the first issue under his direction, readers found a story by a young man named Frank Belknap Long. Long continued to appear regularly and was a close friend of the master weird fictioneer of them all: H. P. Lovecraft. In this magazine, a unique opportunity was offered to all writers, young and old, known and unknown; for while editor Wright used many stories which followed the usual formulas of pulp fiction, he was always open to manuscripts which defied the conformities. "The Man With a Thousand Legs" first appeared in 1927; it was unique at the time, and nothing quite like it has been written since. Only a few elements of style in the opening, and an occasional passage later on, seemed in any way "dated" to us, when we re-read it, and the author welcomed the opportunity to make some revisions. Here, then, is a new version of a classic tale of horror that will never be old.*

SOMEONE RAPPED loudly on the door of my bedroom. As it was past midnight and I'd been unable to sleep, the disturbance was not entirely welcome.

"Who's there?" I asked.

"A young man what insists on being admitted, sir," replied the raucous voice of my housekeeper. "A young man — and very pale and thin he is, sir — what

says he's business that won't wait. 'He's in bed,' I says, but then he says as how you're the only doctor what can help him now. He says as how he hasn't slept or ate for a week, and he ain't nothing but a boy, sir."

"Tell him he can come in," I replied as I slid into my dressing gown and reached for a cigar.

The door opened to admit a thin shaft of light and a young man so incredibly emaciated that I stared at him in horror. He was six feet tall and extremely broad-shouldered, but I doubt if he weighed one hundred pounds. As he approached me he staggered and leaned against the wall for support. His eyes fairly blazed. It was obvious that he was in a highly agitated state and, quite probably, in desperate need of reassurance. I gently indicated a chair and he collapsed into it.

For a moment he sat and surveyed me. When I offered him a cigar, he brushed it aside with a gesture of contempt.

"I don't smoke," he snapped. "It's the last thing I'd care to do. Nothing interferes with clear thinking quite so much as over-indulgence in tobacco."

I hadn't found that to be particularly true, but his prejudice seemed so pronounced that arguing with him about it would have given me no pleasure.

I studied him curiously. He was apparently an extraordi-

nary young man. His forehead was high and broad, his nose was curved like a scimitar, and his lips were so tightly compressed that only a thin line indicated his mouth.

I waited for him to speak, but silence enveloped him like a rubber jacket. "I shall have to break the ice somehow," I reflected; and then suddenly I heard myself asking: "You have something to tell me — some confession, perhaps, that you wish to make to me?"

My question aroused him. His shoulders jerked, and he leaned forward, gripping both arms of his chair.

"Yes — I have a confession. Do you know what it means to be denied the privilege of enlarging the boundaries of human knowledge when you have added a new dimension to human thinking? Once the entire scientific world listened to me with respect and knew how important listening was. And now . . ."

He was trembling so violently that I was obliged to lay a restraining hand on his arm.

"Delusions of grandeur," I thought. "Emotional instability so pronounced almost always has a paranoid component. He's over-compensating for a deep-seated feeling of insecurity."

"When society denies a man of creative genius his birth-right," he went on, "let society take care. I am so afraid of what



I may do that it has made me ill."

"A conservative course of treatment . . ." I began.

"I want no treatment," he shouted, and then, in a less agitated voice, "You would be surprised, perhaps, if I told you my name!"

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Arthur St. Amand," he replied, and stood up.

I was so astonished that I almost dropped my cigar. I may even add that I was momentarily awed. *Arthur St. Amand!*

"Arthur St. Amand," he repeated. "You are naturally amazed to discover that the pale, harassed and emotionally disturbed youth you see before you was once called the peer of Newton and Leonardo Da Vinci. It has its grimly ironic aspects, no doubt, but the tragedy remains. Like Dr. Faustus I once looked upon the face of God, and now I'm less than any schoolboy."

"You are still very young," I gasped. "You can't be more than twenty-four."

"I am twenty-three," he said. "It was precisely three years ago that I published my brochure on etheric vibrations. For six months I lived in a blaze of glory. I was the marvelous boy of the scientific world, and then that Frenchman advanced his theory . . ."

"I suppose you mean Mon-

sieur Paul Rondoli," I interrupted. "I recall the sensation his startling refutation made at the time. He completely eclipsed you in the popular mind, and later the scientific world declared you a fraud. Your star set very suddenly."

"But it will rise again," exclaimed my young visitor. "The world will discuss me again, and this time I shall not be forgotten. I shall prove my theory. I shall demonstrate that the effect of etheric vibration on single cells is to change — to change . . ." He hesitated and then suddenly shouted, "But no, I shall not tell you. I shall tell no one. I came here tonight to unburden my mind to you. At first I thought of going to a priest. It is necessary that I should confess to someone."

"When my thoughts are driven in upon themselves they become monstrous. I chose you because you are a man of intelligence and imaginative discernment and you have heard many confessions. But I shall not discuss etheric vibrations with you. When you see *It* you will understand."

He turned abruptly and walked out of the room and out of my house without once looking back. I never saw him again.

2. *Diary of Thomas Shiel,*  
*Novelist and Short-Story*  
*Writer*

*July 21.* This is my fourth day at the beach. I've already gained three pounds, and I'm so sunbaked that I frightened a little girl when I went swimming this morning. She was building sand castles and when she saw me she dropped her shovel and ran shrieking to her mother. "Horrible black man!" she shouted. I suppose she thought I was a genie out of the *Arabian Nights*. It's pleasant here — I've almost got the evil taste of New York out of my mouth. Elsie's coming down for the week-end.

*July 22.* The little girl I frightened yesterday has disappeared. The police are searching for her and it is generally believed that she has been kidnapped. The unfortunate occurrence has depressed everyone at the beach. All bathing parties have been abandoned, and even the children sit about sad-eyed and dejected. No footprints were found on the sands near the spot where the child was last seen . . . .

*July 23.* Another child has disappeared, and this time the abductor left a clue. A young man's walking stick and hat were found near the scene of a violent struggle. The sand for yards around was stained with blood. Several mothers left the New Beach Hotel this morning with their children.

*July 24* Elsie came this morning. A new crime occurred at the very moment of her arrival, and I scarcely had the heart to explain the situation to her. My paleness evidently frightened her. "What is the matter?" she asked. "You look ill." "I am ill," I replied. "I saw something dreadful on the beach this morning." "Good heavens!" she exclaimed: "have they found one of the children?" It was a great relief to me that she had read about the children in the New York papers. "No," I said. "They didn't find the children, but they found a man with his head bashed in and all the blood had been drained from his body. And close to where he was lying the investigators found curious little mounds of yellowish slime — of ooze. When the sunlight struck this substance it glittered." "Has it been examined under a microscope?" asked Elsie. "They are examining it now," I explained. "We shall know the results by this evening." "God pity us all," said Elsie, and she staggered and nearly fell. I was obliged to support her as we entered the hotel.

*July 25.* Two curious developments. The chemist who examined the jellyish substance found near the body on the beach declares that it is living protoplasm, and he has sent it

to the Department of Health for classification by one of their expert biologists. And a deep pool some eight yards in diameter has been discovered in a rock fissure about a mile from the New Beach Hotel, which evidently harbors some queer denizens. The water in this pool is as black as ink and strongly saline. The pool is eight or ten feet from the ocean, but it is affected by the tides and descends a foot every night and morning.

This morning one of the guests of the hotel, a young lady named Clara Phillips, had come upon the pool quite by accident, and being fascinated by its sinister appearance had decided to sketch it. She had seated herself on the rim of the rock fissure and was in the act of sketching in several large boulders and a strip of beach when something made a curious noise beneath her. "Gulp," it said. "Gulp!" She gave a little cry and jumped up just in time to escape a long golden tentacle which slithered toward her over the rocks.

The tentacle protruded from the very center of the pool, out of the black water, and it filled her with unutterable loathing. She stepped quickly forward and stamped upon it and her attack was so sudden that the thing was unable to flip away from her and escape back into the water. And Miss Phil-

lips was an amazingly strong young woman. She ground the end of the tentacle into a bloody pulp with her heel. Then she turned and ran. She ran as she had not run since her "prep" school days. But as she raced across the soft beach she fancied she could hear a monstrous, lumbering something pursuing her. It is to her credit that she did not look back.

And this is the story of little Harry Doty. I offered him a beautiful new dime, but he told it to me gratis. I give it in his own words.

"Yes sir, I've always knowed about that pool. I used to fish for crabs and sea-cucumbers and big, purple anemones in it, sir. But up until last week I allus knowed what I'd bring up. Onct or twice I used to get somethin' a bit out o' the ordinary, such as a bleedin'-tooth shell or a headless worm with green suckers in its tail and lookin' like the devil on a Sunday outin' or a knowin'-lookin' skate what ud glare and glare at me, sir. But never nothin' like this, sir. I caught it on the top o' its head and it had the most human-lookin' eyes I ever saw. They were blue and soulless, sir. It spat at me, and I throws down my line and beats it. I beats it, sir. Then I hears it come lumbering after me over the beach. It made a funny

gulpin' noise as if it was a-lick-in' its chops."

**JULY 26.** Elsie and I are leaving tomorrow. I'm on the verge of an emotional crackup. Elsie stutters whenever she tries to talk. I don't blame her for stuttering but I can't understand why she wants to talk at all after what we've seen . . . There are some things that can only be expressed by silence.

The local chemist got a report this morning from the Board of Health. The stuff found on the beach consisted of hundreds of cells very much like the cells that compose the human body. And yet they weren't human cells. The biologists were completely mystified by them, and a small culture is now on its way to Washington, and another is being sent to the American Museum of Natural History.

This morning the local authorities investigate the curious black pool in the rocks. Elsie and I and most of the other vacationists were on hand to watch operations. Thomas Wilshire, a member of the New Jersey constabulary, threw a plummet line into the pool and we all watched it eagerly as it paid out. "A hundred feet," murmured Elsie as the police looked at one another in amazement. "It probably went into the sea," someone exclaimed. "I don't think the pool itself is that deep." Thomas Wilshire shook his

head. "There's queer things in that pool," he said. "I don't like the looks of it."

The diver was a bristling, brave little man with some obscure nervous affliction that made him tremble violently. "You'll have to go down at once," said Wilshire. The diver shook his head and shuffled his feet.

"Get him into his suit, boys!" ordered Wilshire, and the poor wretch was lifted bodily upon strong shoulders and transformed into a loathsome, goggle-eyed monster.

In a moment he had advanced to the pool and vanished into its sinister black depths. Two men worked valiantly at the pumps, while Wilshire nodded sleepily and scratched his chin. "I wonder what he'll find," he mused. "Personally, I don't think he's got much chance of ever coming up. I wouldn't be in his shoes for all the gold in Fort Knox."

After several minutes the rubber tubing began to jerk violently. "The poor lad!" muttered Wilshire. "I knew he didn't have a chance. Pull, boys, pull!"

The tubing was rapidly pulled in. There was nothing attached to it, but the lower portion was covered with glittering golden slime. Wilshire picked up the severed end and examined it casually. "Neatly

clipped," he said. "The poor devil!"

The rest of us looked at one another in horror. Elsie grew so pale that I thought she was about to faint. Wilshire was speaking again: "We've made one momentous discovery," he said. We crammed eagerly forward. Wilshire paused for the fraction of a second, and a faint smile of triumph curled his lips. "There's something in that pool," he finished. "Our friend's life has not been given in vain."

I had an absurd desire to punch his fat, triumphant face, and might have done so, but a scream from the others quelled the impulse.

"Look," cried Elsie. She was pointing at the black surface of the pool. It was changing color. Slowly it was assuming a reddish hue; and then a hellish something shot up and bobbed for a moment on its surface. "A human arm!" groaned Elsie and hid her face in her hands. Wilshire whistled softly. Two more objects joined the first and then something round which made Elsie stare and stare through the spaces between her fingers.

"Come away!" I commanded. "Come away at once." I seized her by the arm and was in the act of forcefully leading her from the edge of that dreadful circle of still, dark water when I was arrested by a shout from Wilshire.

"Look at it! Look at it!" he yelled. "That's the horrid thing. God, it isn't human!"

We both turned back and stared. There are blasphemies of creation that can not be described, and the thing which rose up to claim the escaping fragments of its dismantled prey was of that order. I remember vaguely, as in a nightmare of Tartarus, that it had long golden arms which shone and sparkled in the sunlight, and a monstrous curved beak below two piercing blue eyes in which I saw nothing but unutterable malice.

The idea of standing there and watching it munch the fragmentary remains of the poor little diver was intolerable to me, and in spite of the loud protests of Wilshire, who wanted us, I suppose, to try and do something about it, I turned and ran, literally dragging Elsie with me. This was, as it turned out, the wisest thing that I could have done, because the thing later emerged from the pool and nearly got several vacationists. Wilshire fired at it twice with a pistol, but the thing flopped back into the water apparently unharmed and submerged triumphantly.

### 3. *Statement of Henry Greb, Prescription Druggist*

I USUALLY SHUT up shop at 10 o'clock, but at closing

time that evening I was leaning over the counter reading a ghost story, and it was so extremely interesting that I couldn't walk out on it. My nose was very close to the page and I didn't notice anything that was going on about me when suddenly I happened to look up and there he was standing and watching me.

I've seen some pale people in my time (a good many people that come with prescriptions are pale) and I've seen some skinny people, but I never have seen anyone as thin and pale as the young man that stood before me.

"Good heavens!" I said, and shut the book.

The young man's lips were twisted into a sickly smile. "Sorry to bother you," he says. "But I'm in a bad way. I'm in desperate need of medical attention!"

"What can I do to help you?" I says.

He looks at me very solemnly, as if he were making up his mind whether he could trust me. "This is really a case for a physician," he says.

"It's against the law for us to handle such cases," I told him.

Suddenly he held out his hand. I gasped. The fingers were smashed into a bloody pulp, and blood was running down his wrist. "Do something to stop the bleeding," he says. "I'll see a physician later."

Well, I got out some gauze and bound the hand up as best I could. "See a doctor at once," I told him. "Blood-poisoning will set in if you're not careful. Luckily, none of the bones are fractured."

He nodded, and for a moment his eyes flashed. "Damn that woman!" he muttered. "Damn her!"

"What's that?" I asked, but he had got himself together again and merely smiled. "I'm all upset," he said. "Didn't know just what I was saying — you must pardon me. By the way, I've got a little gash on my scalp which you might look at."

He removed his cap and I noticed that his hair was dripping wet. He parted it with his hand about an inch wide. I examined it carefully.

"Your friend wasn't very careful when he cast that plug," I says at length. "I never believe in fly-fishing when there's two in the boat. A friend of mine lost an eye that way."

"It *was* made by a fish-hook," he confessed. "You're something of a Sherlock Holmes, aren't you?"

I brushed aside his compliment with a careless gesture and turned for the bottle of carbolic acid which rested on the shelf behind me. It was then that I heard something between a growl and a gulp from the young man.

I wheeled abruptly, and

caught him in the act of springing upon me. He was foaming at the mouth and his eyes bulged. I reached forward and seized him by the shoulders and in a moment we engaged in a desperate struggle upon the floor. He bit and scratched and kicked at me; and I was obliged to silence him by pummeling his face. It was at that moment that I noticed a peculiar fishy odor in the room, as if a breeze from the sea had entered through the open door.

For several moments I struggled and fought and strained and then something seemed to give suddenly beneath me. The young man slipped from my grasp and made for the door. I endeavored to follow, but I stumbled over something slippery and fell flat upon my face.

When I got up, the young man was gone, and in my hand I held something so weird that I could scarcely believe that it was real, and later I flung it from me with a cry of disgust. It was a reddish, rubbery substance about five inches long, and its under edge was lined with little golden suckers that opened and closed while I stared at them.

I was still laboring under a fearful strain when Harry Morton entered the shop. He was trembling violently, and I noticed that he gazed fearfully behind him as he approached the counter.

"What's the best thing you have for high-falutin'-actin' nerves?" he asks.

"There are some good new sedatives you don't have to have a prescription for," I says. "But what's the trouble with your nerves, Harry?"

"Hallucinations," he groans. "Them, and other things."

"Tell me about it," I says.

"I was leanin' 'gainst a lamp-post," he says, "and I sees a big, lumbering yellowish thing walkin' along the street like a man. It wasn't natural, Henry. I'm not superstitious, but that there thing wasn't natrual. And then it flops into the gutter and runs like a streak of lightnin'. It made a funny noise, too. It said 'Gulp.'"

I dissolved the sedative tablets in a glass of water and handed him the glass over the counter. "I understand, Harry," I says. "But don't go about blowing your head off. No one would believe you."

#### 4. *Statement of Helen Bowan*

I WAS SITTING ON the porch knitting when a young man with a bag stops in front of the house and looks up at me. "Good morning, madam," he says, "have you a room with bath?"

"Look at the sign, young man," I says to him. "I've a nice light room on the second floor

that should just suit you fine."

Up he comes and smiles at me. But as soon as I saw him close I didn't like him. He was so terribly thin, and his hand was bandaged, and he looked as if he had been in a fight.

"How much do you want for the room?" he asks.

"Twelve dollars," I told him. I wanted to get rid of him and I thought the high rate would scare him off, but his hand goes suddenly into his pocket and he brings out a roll of bills, and begins counting them. I gets up very quickly and bows politely to him and takes his grip away from him, and rushes into the hall with it. I didn't want to lose a prospect like that. Cousin Hiram has a game which he plays with shells, and I knew that the young man would be Cousin Hiram's oyster.

I takes him upstairs and shows him the room and he seems quite pleased with it. But when he sees the bathtub he becomes as wildly excited as a schoolboy seeing a lot of nice ripe apples on a tree he can climb, and starts acting so odd that I begins to suspect that he is going out of his mind. "It's just the right size!" he shouts. "I hope you won't mind my keeping it filled all day. I bathe quite often. But I must have some salt to put into it. I can't bathe in fresh water!"

"He's certainly a weird one," I thought, "but I aint complain-

ing. It isn't often Hiram and I land a fish as rich as this one."

Finally he calms down and pushes me out of the room. "Everything's all right," he says. "But I don't want to be disturbed. When you get the salt, put it down in the hall and knock on the door. Under no circumstances must anyone enter this room."

He closed the door in my face and I heard the key grate in the lock. I didn't like it, and I didn't like the sounds that began to come from behind that door. First I heard a great sigh as if somehow he had got something disagreeable off his chest, and then I heard a funny gulping sound that I didn't like. He didn't waste any time in turning on the water either. I heard a great splashing and wallowing, and then, after about fifteen minutes, everything became as quiet as death.

We didn't hear anything more from him until that evening, when I sent Lizzie up with the salt. At first she tried the door, but it was locked, and she was obliged to put the bag down in the hall. But she didn't go away. She squeezed up close against the wall and waited. After about ten minutes the door opened slowly and a long, thin arm shot out and took in the bag. Lizzie said that the arm was yellow and dripping wet, and the thinnest arm she had ever seen. "But he's a thin



young man, Lizzie," I explains to her. "That may be," she says, "but I never saw a human being with an arm like that before!"

Later, along about 10 o'clock I should say, I was sitting in the parlor sewing when I felt something wet land on my hand. I looked up and the ceiling was dripping red. I mean just what I say. The ceiling was all moist and dripping red.

I jumped up and ran out into the hall. I wanted to scream, but I bit my lips until the blood begins running down my chin and that makes me sober and determined. "That young man must go," I says to myself. "I can't have anything that isn't proper going on in this house."

I climbs the stairs looking as grim as death and pounds on the young man's door. "I won't stand for whatever's going on in there!" I shouted. "Open that door."

I heard something flopping about inside, and then the young man speaking to himself in a very low voice. "Its demands are insatiable. The vile, hungry beast! Why doesn't it think of something besides its stomach? I didn't want it to come then. But it doesn't need the ray now. When its appetite is aroused it changes without the ray. God, but I had a hard time getting back! Longer and longer between!"

Suddenly he seemed to hear the pounding. His queer chat-

tering stops and I hear the key turn in the lock. The door opens ever so slightly and his face looks out at me. He is horrible to look at. His cheeks are sunken and there are big horrid rings under his eyes. There is a bandage tied about his head.

"I want you to leave at once," I tells him. "There's queer things going on here and I can't stand for queer things. You've got to leave."

He sighed and nodded. "It's just as well perhaps," he says. "I was thinking of going anyway. There are rats here."

"Rats!" I gasped. But I wasn't really surprised. I knew there were rats in the house. They made life miserable for me. I was never able to get rid of them. Even the cats feared them.

"I can't stand rats," he continues. "I'm packing up — clearing out now." He shuts the door in my face and I hears him throwing his things into a bag. Then the door opens again and he comes out on the landing. He is terribly pale, and he leans against the wall to catch himself, and then he starts descending the stairs.

I watches him as he goes down, and when he reaches the first landing he staggers and leans against the wall. Then he seems to grow shorter and he goes down the last flight three steps at a time. Then he makes a running leap toward the door.

I never saw anyone get through a door so quick, and I begins to suspect that he's done something that he's ashamed of.

So I turns about and goes into the room. When I looks at the floor I nearly faints. It's all slippery and wet, and seven dead rats are lying on their backs in the center of the room. And they are the palest-looking rats I've ever seen. Their noses and tails are pure white and they looks as if they didn't have a drop of blood in them. And then I goes into the alcove and looks at the bathtub. I won't tell you what I see there. But you remember what I says about the ceiling downstairs? I says it was dripping red, and the alcove wasn't so very different.

I gets out of that room as quick as I can, and shuts and locks the door; and then I goes downstairs and telephones to Cousin Hiram. "Come right over, Hiram," I says. "Something terrible has been here!"

5. *Statement of Walter Noyes,  
Lighthouse Keeper*

I WAS PRETTY WELL done up. I'd been polishing the lamps all afternoon, and there were callouses on my hands as big as hen's eggs. I went up into the tower and shut myself in and got a book that I'd been reading off and on for a week. It was a translation of the *Arabian Nights*

by a fellow named Lang. Imaginative stuff like that is a great comfort to a chap when he's shut up by himself away off on the rim of the world, and I always enjoyed reading about Schemselnihar and Deryabar and the young King of the Black Isles.

I was reading the first part of *The King of the Black Isles* and had reached the sentence: "And then the youth drew away his robe and the Sultan perceived with horror that he was a man only to his waist, and from thence to his feet he had been changed into marble," when I happened to look toward the window.

An icy south wind was driving the rain furiously against the panes, and at first I saw nothing but a translucent glitter on the wet glass and vaguely beyond that the gleaming turmoil of dark, enormous waves. Then a dazzling and indescribable shape flattened itself against the window and blotted out the black sea and sky. I gasped and jumped up.

"A monstrous squid!" I muttered. "The storm must have blown it ashore. That tentacle will smash the glass if I don't do something."

I reached for my slicker and hat and in a moment I was descending the spiral stairway three steps at a time. Before emerging into the storm I armed myself with a revolver

and the contents of a tumbler of strong Jamaica rum.

I paused for a moment in the doorway and stared about me. But from where I stood I could see nothing but the tall gray boulders fringing the southern extremity of the island and a stretch of heaving and rolling water. The rain beat against my face and nearly blinded me, and a deep murmur arose from the intolerable wash of the waves. Before me lay only a furious and tortured immensity; behind my back was the warmth and security of my miniature castle, a mellow pipe and a book of valiant stories — but I couldn't ignore the menace of the loathsome shape that had pressed itself against the glass.

I descended three short steps to the rocks and made my way rapidly toward the rear of the lighthouse. Drops of rain more acrid than tears ran down my cheeks and into my mouth and dripped from the corners of my mustache. The overpowering darkness clung like a leech to my clothes. I hadn't gone twenty paces before I came upon a motionless figure.

At first I saw nothing but the head and shoulders of a well-shaped man; but as I drew cautiously nearer I collided with something that made me cry out in terror. A hideous tentacle shot out and wound itself about my leg.

With a startled cry I turned

and attempted to run. But out of the darkness leaped another slimy arm, and another. My fingers tightened on the revolver in my pocket. I whipped it out and opened fire on the writhing horrors.

The report of my gun echoed from the surrounding boulders. A sudden, shrill scream of agony broke the quiet that followed. Then there came a voluble, passionate pleading. "Don't shoot again! Please don't! I'm done up. I was done up when I came here, and I wanted help! I didn't intend to harm you. Before God, I didn't intend that *they* should attack you. But I can't control them now. They're too much for me. *It's* too much for me. Pity me!"

For a moment I was too dazed to think. I stared stupidly at the smoking revolver in my hand and then my eyes sought the ocean. The enormous waves calmed me. Slowly I brought my eyes to bear on the thing before me.

But even as I stared at it my brain reeled again, and a deadly nausea came upon me.

"And then the youth drew away his robe and the Sultan perceived that he was a man only to his waist . . ."

Several feet from where I stood, a monstrous jelly spread itself loathsomely over the dripping rocks, and from its veined central mass a thousand tenta-

cles depended and writhed like the serpents on the head of Medusa. And growing from the middle of this obscenity was the torso and head of a naked young man. His hair was matted and covered with sea-weed; and there were blood-stains upon his high, white forehead. His nose was so sharp that it reminded me of a sword and I momentarily expected to see it glitter in the dim, mysterious light. His teeth chattered so loudly that I could hear them from where I stood; and as I stared wordlessly at him he coughed violently and foamed at the lips.

"Whisky!" he muttered. "I'm all done up! I ran into a ship!"

I was unable to speak, but I believe I made some strange noises in my throat. The young man nodded hysterically.

"I knew you'd understannd," he muttered. "I'm up against it. but I knew you'd help me pull through. A glass of whiskey . . ."

"How did that thing get you?" I shrieked. I had found my voice at last, and was determined to fight my way back to sanity. "How did that thing get its loathsome coils on you?"

"It didn't get me," groaned the young man. "I'm *It*!"

"You're what?"

"A part of *It*," replied the young man.

"Isn't that thing swallowing you?" I screamed at him. "Aren't

you going down into its belly at this moment?"

The young man sadly shook his head. "It's part of me," he said again, and then, more wildly, "I must have something to give me strength. I'm all in. I was swimming on the surface, and a ship came and cut off six of my legs. I'm weak from loss of blood, and I can't stand."

A lean hand went up and brushed the water from battered eyes. "A few of them are still lively," he said, "and I can't control them. They nearly got you — but the others are all in. I can't walk on them."

With as much boldness as I could muster I raised my revolver and advanced upon the thing. "I don't know what you're talking about," I cried. "But I'm going to blow this monster to atoms."

"For heaven's sake, don't!" he shrieked. "That would be murder. We're a human being."

A flash of scarlet fire answered him. Almost unconsciously I had pressed upon the trigger, and now my weapon was speaking again. "I'll blow it to tatters!" I muttered between my teeth. "The vile, crawling devil!"

"Don't! don't!" shrieked the young man and then an unearthly yell came out of the darkness. I saw the thing before me quiver in all its folds, and then it suddenly rose up and towered above me. Blood spurted from

its huge, bloated body, and a crimson shower descended upon me. High above me, a hundred feet in the air, I saw the pale, agonized face of the young man. He was screaming defiantly. He appeared to be walking on stilts. "You can't kill me," he yelled. "I'm stronger than I thought. I'll win out yet."

I raised my revolver to fire again, but before I could take aim the thing swept by me and plunged into the sea. It was perhaps fortunate for me that I did not attempt to follow it. My knees gave beneath and I fell flat upon my face. When I came to so far as to be able to speak I found myself between clean white sheets and staring into the puzzled blue eyes of a government inspector.

"You've had a nasty time of it, lad," he said. "We had to give you stimulants. Did you have a shock of a sort?"

"Of a sort, yes," I replied. "But it came out of the *Arabian Nights*."

### 6. *The Marvelous Boy*

[Curious Manuscript Found in a Bottle]

I WAS THE marvelous boy. My genius amazed the world. A magnificent mind, a sublime destiny! My enemies . . . combined to ruin me. A punctured balloon . . .

A little box, and I put a dog

under it. He changed . . . Jelly! Etheric vibration generates curious changes in living cells . . . Process starts and nothing can stop it. Growth! Enormous growth! Keeps sending out shoots — leg! arms! Marvelous growth! Human being next. Put a little girl under it. She changed. Beautiful jellyfish! It kept getting larger. Fed it mice. Then I destroyed it.

So interesting. Must try it on myself. I know how to get back. Will-power. A child's will is too weak, but a man can get back. No actual change in cell-content.

A tremendous experience! I picked a deep pool where I could hide. Hunger. Saw man on beach.

The police suspect. I must be more careful. Why didn't I take the body out to sea?

Horrible incident. Young lady artist. I almost caught her, but she stamped on a leg. Smashed it. Horrible pain. I certainly must be more careful.

Great humiliation. Little boy hooked me. But I gave him a scare. The little devil! I glared at him. I tried to catch him, but he ran too fast. I wanted to eat him. He had very red cheeks. Adults are harder to drain and digest.

Of course they suspect. Little boys always babble. I wanted to eat him. But I gave them all a good scare, and I got a man. He came down after me in a

diver's suit, but I got him. I took him to pieces. I mean that — literally to pieces. Then I let the fragments float up. I wanted to scare them. I think I did. They ran for their lives. The authorities are fools.

I got back. But it wasn't easy. The thing fought and fought. "I'm master!" I said, and it gulped. It continued to gulp, and then I got back. But my hand was smashed and bleeding!

That fool clerk! Why did he take so long? But he didn't know how hungry his red face made me. The thing came back without the ray. I was standing before the counter and it came back. I sprang at him. I was lucky to get away.

Terrible trouble. I can't keep it from coming back. I wake up in the night, and find it spread out on the bed and all over the floor. Its arms writhe and writhe. And its demands are insatiable. Every waking moment it demands food. Sometimes it completely absorbs me. But now as I write the upper portion of my body is human.

This afternoon I moved to furnished room near beach. Salt water has become a necessity. Change comes on more rapidly now. I can't keep it off. My will is powerless. I filled the tub with water and put in some salt. Then I wallowed in it. Great comfort. Great relief. Hunger. Dreadful, insatiable hunger.

I am all beast, all animal. Rats. I have caught six rats. Delicious. Great comfort. But I've messed up the room. What if the old idiot downstairs should suspect?

She does suspect. Wants me to get out. I shall get out. There is only one refuge for me now. The sea! I shall go to the sea. I can't pretend I'm human any longer. I'm all animal, all beast. What a shock I must have given the old hag! I could hear her teeth chattering as she came up the stairs. All I could do to keep from springing at her.

Into the sea at last. Great relief, great joy. Freedom at last!

A ship. I ran head on into it. Six arms gone. Terrible agony. Flopped about for hours.

Land. I climbed over the rocks and collapsed. Then I managed to get back. Part of me got back. I called for help. A crazy fool came out of the lighthouse and stared at me. Five of my tentacles sprang at him. I couldn't control them. They got him about the leg. He lost his head. Got a revolver and shot at them.

I got them under control. Tremendous effort. Pleaded with him, tried to explain. He would not listen. Shots — many shots. White-hot fire in my body — in my arms and legs. Strength returned to me. I rose up, and went back into the sea. I hate human beings. I am growing larger, and I shall

make myself felt in the world.

ARTHUR ST. AMAND.

# 7. *The Salmon Fishermen*

[Statement of  
William Gamwell]

THERE WERE FIVE of us in the boat: Jimmy Simms, Tom Snodgrass, Harry O'Brien, Bill Samson and myself. "Jimmy," I said, "we may as well open the lunch. I'm not particularly hungry, but the salmon all have their noses stuck in the mud!"

"They sure ain't biting," said Jimmy. "I never seen such a bum run of the lazy critters."

"Don't go complaining," Harry piped up. "We've only been here five hours."

We were drifting toward the east shore and I yelled to Bill to pull on the oars, but he ignored me.

"We'll drift in with the shiping," I warned. "By the way, what's that queer-looking tug with a broken smoke-stack?"

"It came in this morning," said Jim. "It looks like a rum-runner to me."

"They're taking an awful risk," Harry put in. "The revenue cutter's due by here any minute."

"There she is now," said Bill and pointed toward the flats.

Sure enough, there was the government boat, skirting the shore and looking like a lean wasp on the warpath. "She's heading the tug off as sure as

you're born," said Bill. "I'll say we're in for a hot time!"

"Back water!" I shouted. "Do you want to get between 'em?"

Tom and Bill pulled sturdily on the oars and our boat swung out in the direction of the west shore; and then the current took us and carried us downstream.

A signal flag flashed for a moment on the deck of the cutter. Jimmy translated it for us. "Stand to, or we'll fire," he exclaimed. "Now let's see what the tug's got to say to that!"

The tug apparently decided to ignore the command. It rose on a tremorless swell, and plunged doggedly forward. A vast black column ascended from its broken smokestack. "They're putting on steam!" cried Bill. "But they haven't a chance in the world."

"Not a chance," confirmed Tom. "One broadside will blow 'em to atoms."

Bill stood up and clapped his hands to his ears. The rest of us were nearly deafened by the thunderous report. "What did I tell you?" shouted Tom.

We look at the tug. The smokestack was gone and she was wallowing in a heavy swell. "That was only a single shot across her bows," said Bill. "But it did a lot of damage. Wait until they open fire with the big guns!"

We waited, expecting to see something interesting. But we

saw something that nearly frightened us out of our shoes. Between the cutter and the tug a gigantic, yellowish obscenity shot up from the water and towered thirty feet in the air. It thrashed wildly about and made a horrible gulping noise. We could hear the frenzied shrieks of the men on the tug, and from the deck of the cutter someone yelled. "Look at it! Look at it! Oh, my God!"

"Mercy in heaven!" groaned Bill.

"We're in for it!" sobbed Tom.

For a moment the thing simply towered and vibrated between the two boats and then it made for the cutter. It had at least a thousand legs and they waved loathsomely in the sunlight. It had a hooked beak and a great mouth that opened and closed and gulped, and it was larger than a whale. It was horribly, hideously large. It towered above the cutter, and in its swaying immensity it dwarfed the two boats and all the tangled shipping in the harbor.

"Are we alive?" shrieked Bill. "And is that there shore really Long Island? I don't believe it. We're in the Indian Ocean, or the Persian Gulf or the middle of the Hyperborean Sea . . . That there thing is a Jormungander!"

"What's a Jormungandar?" yelled Tom. He was at the end

of his rope and clutching valiantly at straws.

"Them things what live on the bottom of the arctic seas," groaned Bill. "They comes up for air once in a hundred years. I'll take my oath that there thing's a Jormungandar."

Jormungandar or not, it was apparent to all of us that the monster meant business. It was bearing down upon the cutter with incredible ferocity. The water boiled and bubbled in its wake. On the other boats men rushed to the rails and stared with wide eyes.

The officers of the cutter had recovered from their momentary astonishment and were gesticulating furiously and running back and forth on the decks. Three guns were lowered into position and directed at the on-rushing horror. A little man with gilt braid on his sleeves danced about absurdly on his toes and shouted out commands at the top of his voice.

"Don't fire until you can look into his eyes!" he yelled. "We can't afford to miss him. We'll give him a broadside he won't forget."

"It isn't human, sir!" someone yelled. "There was nothing like it before in the world."

The men aboard the tug were obviously rejoicing. Caps and pipes ascended into the air and the decks echoed with loud shouts of triumph. We could



hear the shouts almost as clearly as if we'd been right on the tug's foredeck, joining in the celebration.

"Fire!" shouted the blue-coated midget on the cutter.

"It won't do 'em no good!" shouted Bill, as the thunder of the guns smote our ears. "It won't do 'em a bit of good."

As it turned out, Bill was right. The tremendous discharge failed to arrest the progress of the monster.

It rose like a cloud from the water and flew at the cutter like a flying-fish. Furiously it stretched forth its enormous, arms, and embraced the cutter. it wrenched the little vessel from the trough of the wave in which it wallowed and lifted it violently into the air.

Its great golden sides shone like the morning star, but red blood trickled from a gaping hole in its throat. Yet it ignored its wounds. It lifted the small steel ship into the air in its gigantic, weaving arms.

I shall never forget that moment. I have but to shut my eyes and it is before me now. I see again that gigantic horror from the measureless abysses, that twisting, fantastic monstrosity from depths of blackest midnight. And in its colossal arms and legs I see a tiny ship from whose deck a hundred little men fall shrieking and screaming into the sea beneath its hideously writhing tentacles.

It's glittering bulk hid the sun. It towered to the zenith and its weaving arms twisted the cutter into a shapeless mass of glistering steel.

"We're next!" muttered Bill. "There ain't nothing that can save us now. A man ain't got a chance when he runs head-on against a Jormungandar!"

My other companions fell up-on their knees and little Harry O'Brien turned yellow under the gills. But the thing did not attack us. Instead, with a heart-breaking scream that seemed outrageously human it sank beneath the waves, carrying with it the flattened, absurd remains of the cutter and the crushed and battered bodies of a hundred men. And as it sank loathsomely from sight the water about it flattened out into a tremorless plateau and turned the color of blood.

Bill was at the oars now, shouting and cursing to encourage the rest of us. "Pull, boys," he commanded. "Let's try to make the south shore before that there fish comes up for breath. There ain't one of us here what wants to live for the rest of his life on the bottom of the sea. There ain't one of us here what ud care to have it out with a Jormungadar."

In a moment we had swung the boat about and were making for the shore. Men on the other ships were crying and waving to us, but we didn't

stop to hand in any reports. We weren't thinking of anything but a huge monstrosity that we would see towering and towering into the sky as long as our brains hung together in our foolish little heads.

### 8. *News Item in the Long Island Gazette*

THE BODY OF A young man, about 25 years old, was found this morning on a deserted beach near Northport. The body was horribly emaciated and the coroner, Mr. E. Thomas Bogart, discovered three small wounds on the young man's thigh. The edges of the wounds were stained as though from gunpowder. The body scarcely weighed one hundred pounds. It is thought that the youth was the victim of foul play and inquiries are being made in the vicinity.

### 9. *The Box of Horror* [Statement of Harry Olson]

I HADN'T HAD A thing to eat for three days, and I was driven to the cans. Sometimes you find something valuable in the cans and sometimes you don't; but anyhow, I was working 'em systematically. I had gone up the street and down the street, and hadn't found a thing for my pains except an old pair of suspenders and a tin of salmon. But when I came to the

last house I stopped and stared. Then I stretched out a lean arm and picked up the box. It was a funny-looking box, with queer glass sides and little peek-holes in the side of it, and a metal compartment about three inches square in back of it, and a slide underneath large enough to hold a man's hand.

I looked up at the windows of the house, but there wasn't anyone watching me, and so I slipped the box under my coat and made off down the street. "It's something expensive, you can bet your life on that," I thought. "Probably some old doctor's croaked and his widow threw the thing away without consulting anyone. This is a real scientific affair, this is, and I ought to get a week's board out of it."

I wanted to examine the thing better and so I made for a vacant lot where I wouldn't be interrupted. Once there I sat myself down behind a sign-board and took the contraption from under my coat and looked at it.

Well, sir, it interested me. There was a little lever on top of it you pressed and the slide fell down and something clicked in the metal box in back of it, and the thing lighted up.

I realized at once that something was meant to go on the slide. I didn't know just what, but my curiosity was aroused. "That light isn't there for no-

thing." I thought. "This box means business."

I began to wonder what would happen if something alive were put on the slide. There was a clump of bushes near where I was sitting and I got up and made for it. It took me some time to get what I was after; but when I caught it I held it firmly between my thumb and forefinger so it couldn't escape, and then I talked to it. "Grasshopper," I said, "I haven't any grudge against you personally, but the scientific mind is no respecter of persons."

The infernal varmint wriggled and wriggled and covered my thumb with molasses, but I didn't let up on him. I held him firmly and pushed him onto the slide. Then I turned on the lever and peeped through the holes.

The poor little creature squirmed and fluttered for several minutes and then he began to dissolve. He got flabbier and flabbier and soon I could see right through him. When he was nothing but ooze he began to wriggle. I dumped him on the ground and he scurried away faster than a centipede.

"I'm deluding myself," I thought "I'm seeing things that never happened."

Then I did a very foolish thing. I thrust my hand into the box and turned on the lever. For several moments nothing

happened and then my hand began to get cold. I peeped through the holes and what I saw made me scream and draw my hand out and go running about the lot like a madman. My hand was a mass of writhing, twisting snakes! Leastwise, they looked like snakes at first, but later I saw that they were soft and yellow and rubbery and much worse than snakes.

But even then, I didn't altogether lose my head. Leastwise, I didn't lose it for long. "This is sheer hallucination," I said to myself, "and I am going to argue myself out of it."

I sat down on a big boulder and held my hand up and looked at it. It had a thousand fingers and they dripped, but I made myself look at 'em. I did some tall arguing. "Snap out of it," I said, "You're imagining things." I thought the fingers began to shorten and stiffen a little. "You're imagining all this," I continued. "It's the sheerest bunk. That box isn't anything out of the ordinary."

Well, sir, you may not believe it, but I argued myself back into sanity. I argued my hand back to normal. The wriggling, twisting things got shorter and fatter and joined together and before long I had a hand with fingers.

Then I stood up and shouted. Luckily no one heard me, and there wasn't anyone to watch me dancing about on my toes

either. When I got out of breath I picked the infernal box up and walked away with it. I made directly for the river. "You've had your day," I said. "You won't turn any more poor critters into jelly-fish!"

Well, sir, I threw the vile thing into the river, but first I smashed it against the planks

on the wharf until it looked like nothing on earth under the stars.

"And that's the end of you," I shouted as it sank. I ought to have got a medal for that, but I ain't complaining. It isn't every man has the pleasure of calling himself a disinterested benefactor of humanity.

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Lovers of horror stories may still be able to find a copy of Frank Belknap Long's collection, "The Hounds Of Tindales" in second hand book stores — the volume is now out of print, but worth tracking down.

Mr. Long has had four hardbound novels (a fifth is in the writing) and eight paperback novels published, most of them science fiction; one paperback, "Space Station #1" has recently been reissued by Ace Books. His collection of the adventures of John Carstairs, botanical detective of the future, received a writeup and biographical sketch in the **New York Times** — a rarity for authors of horror, fantastic, and science fiction.

His early novel of cosmic horror, written in the Lovecraft tradition, "The Horror From The Hills", has just been published by Arkham House and is a good three dollars worth of bizarre fiction. His short stories, both science fiction and strange, have appeared in over 25 clothbound anthologies, and one of his most powerful science fiction tales was presented over CBS-TV.

In our next issue, we plan to present a revised version of another of Long's early Lovecraftian tales, "The Space Eaters".

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# A Thing Of Beauty

by Wallace West

*Wallace West is another of the many well-known writers of imaginative fiction who made their debut in Farnsworth Wright's WEIRD TALES. There is a deceptive aura of fun that runs through his novels, for sardonic humor, the shocking, and the terrifying may peer through or emerge at any moment. Despite his openness to all bizarre themes, Mr. Wright did, at times, reject a story as too horrible; and here is one occasion where we feel that he was the loser, and we are the gainers.*

EACH WINTER day at dawn old John Short scurried along the snow-covered streets of Cloverdale enroute to open the drafts of the furnace which spread a little warmth through Medical College.

Milkmen and other early-risers chuckled as they saw him limping past, whistling a lively tune or reciting snatches of poetry. The very sight of him, they said, brought them good luck that day.

But it was not the thought of poking into the bowels of the furnace or carting out the ashes which made the hunchback's lips pucker with the notes of "Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage" or roll out a Wordsworthian sonnet. It was the anticipation of his weazened face to beam like the not-yet-risen sun.

Short, you see, also was in charge of the brine vat in which floated the corpses kept for dissection by the students of

Northern Med. For more years than Henry Wyndam, N.M.C.'s white-haired president, could remember, Old John had tended the "Stiff Room" when he was not nursing the furnace or bedeviling the school librarian for more books of poetry.

Every morning, as soon as the leaky radiators began clanking in the empty classrooms, Short would brush the ashes from his overalls, rub his gnarled hands and take from its corner a fifteen-foot pole with a hook on the end. Then he would head for the brine vat, whistling as he went.

John's greeting to his charges had once been overheard by a student who had come to school early to make up some back work, but had been forced to seek the furnace room to warm his half-frozen hands and feet.

"I tell you, I heard him talking to those stiffies just as if they'd been alive," the boy related afterward with a noticeable lack of that *sang froid* upon which prospective doctors pride themselves.

"I was standing by the furnace when I heard him go by, dragging something along the floor. I followed, thinking I'd play a joke on him.

"He reached the stiff room before I caught up. As he had left the door open, I slipped inside with the idea of setting up

a groan which would scare the wits out of him."

The student stopped, rolled a cigarette with fingers which shook slightly, lighted it on the third try, and inhaled mightily.

"Well, go on, Moony," suggested one of his cronies. "What happened when you yowled?"

"I didn't yowl. . . . You know that gas jet with the evil purple globe which sticks out over the vat? Well, Old John was standing so its beams fell directly on his ugly mug. For a long time he just stood there, with his long hairy arms on his crooked hips, laughing fit to kill. But he didn't make a sound!

"Then he reached out with a long pole and hooked the end of it under the armpit of one of the stiffies. . . ."

"Aw, cut it," snapped one of Moony's listeners. "I've just had lunch."

"Old John pulled the body up to the edge of the vat and turned it 'round so it faced him. Then he sat down on the edge of the pool and swung his crooked legs back and forth.

"'Mornin', Mike,' he said, friendly-like. 'Your skin's in the sere and yellow leaf, but it's still nice and firm, ain't it? Can't say I don't take care of you, can you, Mike boy?'"

"Well?" Moony's auditors had lost their grins. They pressed closer.

"Well, that stiff rolled back

and forth in the little waves which John had made dragging it in, and damned if it didn't seem half alive.

"Thought you were pretty fine when you worked 'in the blacksmith shop, didn't you?" John went on as if he were talking to an old friend. "Remember how proud you were of your big muscles — like iron bands, didn't the poet say? Picked me up with one hand and laughed at my crooked back once. Remember? Didn't think then you'd be hanged for murder and wind up in a brine vat talking to me, did you, Mike?"

"The old man seemed to listen as if for an answer," Moony continued. "Then he nodded cheerfully and reached out his pole. 'Sure I'll roll you over — roll you over slow,' he said. 'Course you don't want your face to get any blacker than it already is. Proud of your looks to the last, ain't you, Mike? Just wait till I send you to the dissecting room.'

"John laughed that silent laugh again. Then he flipped the big fellow over like a dead fish and reached for another corpse."

"What'd he say next, Moony?" someone inquired.

"I — I don't know. I felt kinda sick — the air down there always gets me, you know. I went upstairs."

After that the students tried teasing the janitor about his

friends in the vat. But they didn't keep it up; for the first time they could remember, Short lost his good humor and snarled at them. From that time on he kept the stiff room door locked, except when receiving a body or sending one to the operating table.

But the youngsters, killing time by telling horror stories between classes, insisted that Old John still held his morning conversations, twitting his charges about their fine physiques, jeering at their former intelligence and stations in life; boasting that he, with his broken body, had become their master in the end.

SHORT'S IDYLIC life received a shock on the day that the body of Miss X was delivered to the college in accordance with the wish found in a scribbled note when police broke into a gas-filled room at the Cloverdale Hotel.

Beaming with delight, Old John received the corpse from the coroner, trundled it into the basement on a sort of wheelbarrow and stripped off the winding sheet preparatory to pushing the nude body into his vat.

Then he stopped, his mouth forming a great O, his red-rimmed eyes popping. Before him was the most beautiful creature he had ever looked upon. Slim, long-limbed and exquisite, lying as if she were

only asleep, Miss X seemed to light up the dingy room.

John's ugly face was transformed. He ran his calloused fingers through that halo of golden curls and touched the closed eyelids tenderly. Then, as he lifted the rigid figure in his arms and lowered it into the liquid of the vat, he mumbled, like a prayer, a snatch from Keat's "Ode to a Grecian Urn."

*"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,  
— that is all  
Ye know on earth, and all ye  
need to know."*

After that day, not even the milkman saw John Short, so early in the morning did he skitter from his shack to the college basement.

Once there, he did not stop to fire the furnace but raced to the stiff room, so afraid was he that someone might have stolen his treasure.

Forgotten were the other bodies at which he once had mocked. Now he sat for hours, staring down at the half-drowned, changeless Miss X, or straining his little eyes and setting the echoes atwitter as he read from a precious, dog-eared volume of Keats, Shelley, or Coleridge. Old John, born in agony and squalor, raised in filth and degradation and living to be the hideous laughing stock of all men, at long last had found something which, to his cloud-

ed mind, seemed ageless and beautiful.

"Oh, if I had been straight and strong and young, I might have found you before you stuffed those cracks in the windows and turned on the gas — I might have saved you from this," he would moan after he had turned the body on its back. (Dead women float face downward while men lie with their dead eyes glaring at the sky.) "Yet, if I had not been what I am, I might never have found you." And he would recite softly:

*" 'A thing of beauty is a joy  
forever:  
Its loveliness increases; it will  
never  
Pass into nothingness.' "*

Then, as an angry roaring from the furnace room told him that President Wyndham was in his office and furious because of the icy radiators, he would push the body into the darkest corner of the pool and hurry out, locking and double-barring the door.

Whenever a call would come for a cadaver, Short would allow no one in the stiff room but himself. Tugging and splashing at the edge of the vat he would somehow manage to drag out one of his neglected charges. Then he would appear at the door, panting and chuckling, to turn over the body to the stu-



dent who had been sent for it.

The janitor's moodiness and neglect of his duties could not fail to come to the attention of President Wyndham.

"Poor Short is getting feeble," sighed that other elderly man. "We'll hire an assistant to do the heavy work."

And so a weak-chinned Swedish lad was installed in the furnace room and the radiators whistled as they had not done in years.

The newcomer lived in constant dread of Old John, despite Wyndham's assurances. When not actually at work on the fires he could always be seen, no matter how cold the weather, standing outside the basement door and casting frightened glances over his shoulder.

"Aye don't like dat faller. He bane a hex," was all Olaf would say when the rowdies upstairs twitted him.

ANOTHER ELEMENT began to threaten John's happiness as the dreary winter months passed. Hard times were creeping upon Northern Med. Bryan thundered about "Free Silver" but there was little of it available as 1893 crawled into 1894. Endowments were not forthcoming as of old. Interest on invested funds fell away. Enrollments decreased. It was a time sacred to the Goat God — a time of panic.

Wyndham now sat for long

hours in his cold, walnut-panelled office, gnawing his scraggly moustache and thinking up schemes to keep the school going. Despite his labors, the situation grew steadily worse.

Seldom were corpses delivered to Old John now. They cost money, just as did coal and surgical instruments. Instead of twenty bodies, he had eighteen . . . then twelve . . . then five.

Now a different tone crept into his conversations with Miss X. Despair and fright made him tremble as with the palsy when he crouched beside the salt-encrusted vat.

"They shan't have you," he would whisper, glancing toward the door where he was confident that Olaf stood eavesdropping. "You shall never be reduced to dripping bones and sinews by those glistening knives. They'll never send you in pieces to the Potters' Field. Didn't the poet say:

*"That dead men rise up never;  
That even the weariest river  
Winds somewhere safe to sea."*

"Have no fear." Then he would shake his knobby fists in the direction of Wyndham's office and scream: "Do you hear, you old fool? You shan't lay a scalpel on her."

The body, perhaps shaken by sound vibrations, would seem to nod its golden head in approval.

CAME THE TIME when the only body left in the pool was that of Miss X.

Came the time when "Moony", now an assistant professor in the dissecting room, sent down a requisition for another corpse.

Half an hour later he looked up from directing a delicate operation to see Old John crouched blinking in the doorway.

"Got that stiff ready?" he smiled as he stripped off his rubber gloves.

"Sorry, Mr. Perkins, sir. I haven't any more. The vat is empty."

"The devil! Is it as bad as that? I thought we had one left. I'll speak to President Wyndham about this at once."

"I — I wouldn't bother him, sir," stammered the janitor. "I give you my word there are no more."

Surprised by the tone and the stealthily shifting eyes, Moony glanced sharply at the old man.

"It's not your fault, John," he said soothingly. "Don't take it so hard. Here, come with me. We'll both talk to Mr. Wyndham about getting some new raw material." He started out the door.

"Wait! Wait!" The janitor gripped his arm, unmindful of the staring students. "Don't do anything yet. Perhaps I was mistaken. I — I forgot. I think there's one stiff left. It's badly mutilated. I thought — I didn't

think you'd want that one. I'll have it ready in an hour."

"Why, you dithering old fool . . ." Moony began. But the cripple already was lurching down the hall as fast as his legs could carry him.

HALF AN HOUR later a blood-smeared apparition burst howling into Wyndham's office.

It was Olaf, but he was hardly recognizable; there was a deep gash in his scalp from which blood was pouring. His eyes were wild with pain and terror.

"Ow, Mr. Wyndham," he gabbled as he clung to the president's desk. "Something bane hit me. I lean over firebox. I poke furnace. Then . . ." He slumped to the floor.

"Perkins!" Wyndham shouted through the operating room door. Moony came running. As they bound up the jagged wound, suspicions gripped the young doctor. He repeated his conversation with Short.

"But that's nonsense," snapped Wyndham as he washed Olaf's blood off his hands. "There is another body down there. I ran across the requisition just this morning. Here it is, on my desk. On September first of last yaeer we accepted the body of a Miss X from the coroner.

"Short could have had nothing to do with this. Something must have fallen off the furnace and struck Olaf on the head. This

boy will be coming 'round in a minute. Then we'll go down and make Old John let us look in the vat."

"You stay here and care for him," Moony said tensely. "I'll talk to John."

He ran downstairs and shouted for the janitor.

There was no answer. The furnace room was deserted.

"John," he called, rattling the locked door of the vat room. "Open the door at once. Wyndham's orders!"

"The old fool is angry because I wouldn't believe him," Moony grunted when there was no reply. "I suppose he's gone home in a huff."

He returned to the furnace room and bellowed up the speaking tube.

"Break down the door," the command came rasping down to him. "There's going to be no mystery around this college."

"I'll be with you in a second."

The president found the professor, heavy shovel in hand, standing puzzled just inside the wreckage of the stiff room entrance.

"That's funny, sir," the young man stammered as he felt the other's hand on his shoulder. "What on earth could have induced Old John to say the vat was empty? There are two bodies floating in it."



A spare-time author, Wallace West's short science fiction stories have appeared in *Boy's Life*, as well as the regular science fiction magazines. Five of his novels have appeared in hard covers, one of them, "The Memory Bank" issued in paperback by Air-mont last year. His ambition, he tells us, is to write a historical novel of colonial New York City — if he can find a publisher who will accept a historically accurate account of that scandalous, ribald era which makes the traditional current "sexy" historical novel sound tame by comparison.



# The Yellow Sign

by Robert W. Chambers

*Readers of historical romances, who had become followers of the works of Robert W. Chambers, must have been both startled and puzzled in 1895 when they turned to their favorite's latest book, "The King In Yellow" and found a collection of stories, most of them loosely connected, written after the manner of the "gothic" novel. But it is the spirit, not the letter, of the gothic novel that you will find in "The Yellow Sign", the best of the series. Here is no outworn setting of gloomy castles or decaying mansions, no opening with howling winds, driving rain, and lightning. The story opens amidst the "roar and turmoil of Broadway at six o'clock" of a spring day — a bright day, darkened by the shadows that crouch behind the scenes . . .*

*"Let the red dawn surmise  
What we shall do  
When this blue starlight dies,  
And all is through."*

THERE ARE SO many things which are impossible to explain! Why should certain chords in music make me think of the brown and golden tints of autumn foliage? Why should the

Mass of Sainte-Cecile send my thoughts wandering among caverns whose walls blaze with ragged masses of virgin silver? What was it in the roar and turmoil of Broadway at six o'clock that flashed before my eyes the picture of a still Breton forest where sunlight filtered through spring foliage, and Sylvia bent, half curiously, half

tenderly, over a small green lizard, murmuring, "To think that this also is a little ward of God?"

When I first saw the watchman his back was towards me. I looked at him indifferently, until he went into the church. I paid no more attention to him than I had to any other man who lounged through Washington Square that morning, and when I shut my window and turned back into my studio I had forgotten him. Late in the afternoon, the day being warm, I raised the window again and leaned out to get a sniff of air. A man was standing in the courtyard of the church, and I noticed him again with as little interest as I had that morning. I looked across the square to where the fountain was playing, and then, with my mind filled with vague impressions of trees, asphalt drives, and the moving groups of nursemaids and holiday-makers, I started to walk back to my easel. As I turned, my listless glance included the man below in the churchyard. His face was towards me now, and with a perfectly involuntary movement, I bent to see it. At the same moment he raised his head and looked at me. Instantly I thought of a coffin-worm. Whatever it was about the man that repelled me, I did not know, but the impression of a plump white grave-worm was so intense and nauseating that I

must have shown it in my expression, for he turned his puffy face away with a movement which made me think of a disturbed grub in a chestnut.

I went back to my easel and motioned the model to resume her pose. After working awhile, I was satisfied that I was spoiling what I had done as rapidly as possible, and I took up a palette-knife and scraped the color out again. The flesh tones were sallow and unhealthy, and I did not understand how I could have painted such sickly color into a study which before that had glowed with healthy tones.

I looked at Tessie. She had not changed, and the clear flush of health dyed her neck and cheeks as I frowned.

"Is it something I've done?" she asked.

"No. I've made a mess of this arm, and for the life of me I can't see how I came to paint such mud as that into the canvas," I replied.

"Don't I pose well?" she insisted.

"Of course, perfectly."

"Then it's not my fault?"

"No. It's my own."

"I'm very sorry," she said.

I told her she could rest while I applied rag and turpentine to the plague-spot on my canvas, and she went off to smoke a cigarette and look over the illustrations in the *Courier Francais*.

I did not know whether it

was something in the turpentine or a defect in the canvas, but the more I scrubbed the more that gangrene seemed to spread. I worked like a beaver to get it out, and yet the disease appeared to creep from limb to limb of the study before me. Alarmed, I strove to arrest it, but now the color of the flesh changed and the whole figure seemed to absorb the infection as a sponge soaks up water. Vigorously I plied palette-knife, turpentine, and scraper, thinking all the time what a seance I should hold with Duval, who had sold me the canvas; but soon I noticed that it was not the canvas which was defective, nor yet the colors of Edward.

"It must be the turpentine," I thought, angrily, "or else my eyes have become so blurred and confused by the afternoon light that I can't see straight." I called Tessie, the model. She came and leaned over my chair, blowing rings of smoke into the air.

"What *have* you been doing to it?" she exclaimed.

"Nothing," I growled; "it must be this turpentine!"

"What a horrible color it is now," she continued. "Do you think my flesh resembles green cheese?"

"No, I don't," I said, angrily. "did you ever know me to paint like that before?"

"No, indeed!"

"Well, then!"

"It must be the turpentine, or something," she admitted.

SHE WALKED TO the window. I scraped and rubbed until I was tired, and finally picked up my brushes and hurled them through the canvas with a forcible expression, the tone alone of which reached Tessie's ears.

Hearing this she promptly began: "That's it! Swear and act silly and ruin your brushes! You have been three weeks on that study, and now look! What's the good of ripping the canvas? What creatures artists are!"

I felt about as much ashamed as I usually did after such an outbreak, and I turned the ruined canvas to the wall. Tessie helped me clean my brushes, and then danced away to get ready to go home. Then she regaled me with bits of advice concerning whole or partial loss of temper, until thinking perhaps I had been tormented sufficiently, she suddenly changed the subject.

"Everything went wrong from the time you came back from the window and talked about that horrid-looking man you saw in the churchyard," she announced.

"Yes, he probably bewitched the picture," I said, yawning. I looked at my watch.

"It's after six, I know," said

Tessie, adjusting her hat before the mirror.

"Yes," I replied. "I didn't mean to keep you so long." I leaned out of the window, but recoiled with disgust, for the young man with the pasty face stood below in the churchyard. Tessie saw my gesture of disapproval, and leaned from the window.

"Is that the man you don't like?" she whispered.

I nodded.

"I can't see his face, but he does look fat and soft. Some way or other," she continued, turning to look at me, "he reminds me of a dream — an awful dream — I once had. Or," she mused, looking down at her shapely shoes, "was it a dream after all?"

"How should I know?" I smiled.

Tessie smiled in reply.

"You were in it," she said, "so perhaps you might know something about it."

"Tessie! Tessie!" I protested, "don't you dare flatter by saying that you dream about me!"

"But I did," she insisted.

"Shall I tell you about it?"

"Go ahead," I replied, lighting a cigarette.

Tessie leaned back on the open window-sill and began, very seriously:

"One night last winter I was lying in bed thinking about nothing at all in particular. I had

been posing for you and I was tired out, yet it seemed impossible for me to sleep. I heard the bells in the city ring ten, eleven, and midnight. I must have fallen asleep about midnight, because I don't remember hearing the bells after that. It seemed to me that I had scarcely closed my eyes when I dreamed that something impelled me to go to the window. I rose, and, raising the sash, leaned out. Twenty-fifth Street was deserted as far as I could see. I began to be afraid. Everything outside seemed so — so black and uncomfortable. Then the sound of wheels in the distance came to my ears, and it seemed to me as though that was what I must wait for.

"Very slowly the wheels approached, and, finally, I could make out a vehicle moving along the street. It came nearer and nearer, and when it passed beneath my window I saw it was a hearse. Then as I trembled with fear, the driver turned and looked straight at me. When I awoke I was standing by the open window shivering with cold, but the black-plumed hearse and the driver were gone. I dreamed this dream again in March last, and again awoke beside the open window. Last night the dream came again. You remember how it was raining. When I awoke, standing at the open window, my night-dress was soaked."

"But where did I come into the dream?" I asked.

"You — you were in the coffin, but you were not dead."

"In the coffin?"

"Yes."

"How did you know? Could you see me?"

"No. I only knew you were there."

"Had you been eating Welsh rarebits, or lobster salad?" I began to laugh, but the girl interrupted me with a frightened cry.

"Hello! What's up?" I said, as she shrank into the embrasure by the window.

"The — the man below in the churchyard . . . he drove the hearse."

"Nonsense," I said; but Tessie's eyes were wide with terror. I went to the window, and looked out. The man was gone. "Come, Tessie," I urged, "don't be foolish. You have posed too long. You are nervous."

"Do you think I could forget that face?" she murmured. "Three times I saw the hearse pass below my window, and every time the driver turned and looked up at me. Oh, his face was so white and — and soft! It looked dead — it looked as if it had been dead a long time."

I induced the girl to sit down and swallow a glass of Marsala. Then I sat down beside her and tried to give her some advice.

"Look here, Tessie," I said,

"you go to the country for a week or two, and you'll have no more dreams about hearses. You pose all day, and when night comes your nerves are upset. You can't keep this up. Then again, instead of going to bed when your day's work is done, you run off to picnics at Sulzer's Park, or go to the Eldorado or Coney Island, and when you come down here next morning you are fagged out. There was no real hearse. That was a soft-shell-crab dream."

She smiled faintly.

"What about the man in the churchyard?"

"Oh, he's only an ordinary, unhealthy, everyday creature."

"As true as my name is Tessie Reardon, I swear to you, Mr. Scott, that the face of the man below in the churchyard is the face of the man who drove the hearse!"

"What of it?" I said. "It's an honest trade."

"Then you think I *did* see the hearse?"

"Oh," I said, diplomatically, "if you really did, it might not be unlikely that the man below drove it. There is nothing in that."

Tessie rose, unrolled her scented handkerchief, and, taking a bit of gum from a knot in the hem, placed it in her mouth. Then, drawing on her gloves, she offered me her hand with a frank "Goodnight, Mr. Scott," and walked out.



## 2

THE NEXT morning, Thomas, the bellboy, brought me the *Herald* and a bit of news. The church next door had been sold. I thanked Heaven for it, not that I, being a Catholic, had any repugnance for the congregation next door, but because my nerves were shattered by a blatant exhorter, whose every word echoed through the aisles of the church as if it had been my own rooms, and who insisted on his r's with a nasal persistence which revolted my every instinct.

Then, too, there was a fiend in human shape, an organist, who reeled off some of the grand old hymns with an interpretation of his own, and I longed for the blood of a creature who could play the "Doxology" with an amendment of minor chords which one hears only in a quartet of very young undergraduates. I believe the minister was a good man, but when he bellowed, "And the Lorrd said unto Moses, the Lorrd is a man of war; the Lorrd is his name. My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sworrd!" I wondered how many centuries of purgatory it would take to atone for such a sin.

"Who bought the property?" I asked Thomas.

"Nobody that I knows, sir. They do say the gent wot owns

this 'ere 'Amilton flats was lookin' at it. 'E might be a bildin' more studios."

I walked to the window. The young man with the unhealthy face stood by the churchyard gate, and at the mere sight of him the same overwhelming repugnance took possession of me.

"By-the-way, Thomas," I said, "who is that fellow down there?"

Thomas sniffed. "That there worm, sir? 'E's night-watchman of the church, sir. 'E makes me tired a-sittin' out all night on them steps and lookin' at you insultin' like. I'd 'a' punched is 'ed, sir — beg pardon, sir —"

"Go on, Thomas."

"One night a comin' 'ome with 'Arry, the other English boy, I sees 'im a sittin' there on them steps. We 'ad Molly and Jen with us, sir, the two girls on the tray service, an' 'e looks so insultin' at us that I up and sez, 'Wat you lookin' hat, you fat slug?' — beg pardon, sir, but that's 'ow I sez, sir. Then 'e don't say nothin', and I sez, 'Come out and I'll punch that puddin', 'ed.' Then I hopens the gate an' goes in, but 'e don't say nothin', only looks insultin' like. Then I 'its 'im one, but, ugh! 'is e'd was that cold and mushy it ud sicken you to touch im."

"What did he do then?" I asked curiously.

"'Im? Nawthin'."

"And you, Thomas?"

The young fellow flushed

with embarrassment, and smiled uneasily.

"Mr Scott, sir, I aint no coward, an' I can't make it out at all why I run. I was in the Fifth Lawncers, sir, at Tel-el-Kebir, an' was shot by the wells."

"You don't mean to say you ran away?"

"Yes, sir. I run."

"Why?"

"That's just what I want to know, sir. I grabbed Molly an' run, an' the rest was as frightened as I."

"But what were they frightened at?"

Thomas refused to answer for a while; but now my curiosity was aroused about the repulsive young man below, and I pressed him. Three years' sojourn in America had modified Thomas's cockney dialect but he was still "close."

"You won't believe me, Mr. Scott, sir!"

"Yes, I will"

"You will lawf at me, sir?"

"Nonsense!"

He hesitated. "Well, sir, it's Gawd's truth, that when I 'it 'im, 'e grabbed me wrists, sir, and when I twisted 'is soft, mushy fist one of 'is fingers come off in me 'and."

The utter loathing and horror of Thomas's face must have been reflected in my own, for he added, "It's orful, an' now when I see 'im I just go away. 'E maikes me hill."

When Thomas had gone I

went to the window. The man stood beside the church railing, with both hands on the gate; but I hastily retreated to my easel again, sickened and horrified, for I saw that the middle finger of his right hand was missing.

AT NINE O'CLOCK Tessie appeared, with a merry "Good-morning, Mr. Scott." When she had taken her pose upon the model-stand I started a new canvas, much to her delight. She remained silent as long as I was on the drawing, but as soon as the scrape of the charcoal ceased, and I took up my fixative, she began to chatter.

"Oh, I had such a lovely time last night. We went to Tony Pastor's."

"Who are 'we'?" I demanded.

"Oh, Maggie — you know, Mr. Whyte's model — and Pinkie McCormick — we call her Pinkie because she's got that beautiful red hair you artists like so much — and Lizzie Burke."

I sent a shower of spray from the fixative over the canvas, and said, "Well, go on."

"We saw Kelly, and Baby Barnes, the skirt-dancer, and — and all the rest. I made friends with a new fellow."

"Then you have gone back on me, Tessie?"

She laughed and shook her head.

"He's Lizzie Burke's brother,

Ed. He's a perfect gen'l'man."

Then she related how Ed had come back from the stocking-mill in Lowell, Massachusetts, to find her and Lizzie grown up — and what an accomplished young man he was — and how he thought nothing of squandering half a dollar for ice-cream and oysters to celebrate his entry as clerk into the woollen department of Macy's. Before she finished I began to paint, and she resumed the pose, smiling and chattering like a sparrow. By noon I had the study fairly well rubbed in and Tessie came to look at it.

"That's better," she said.

I thought so, too, and ate my lunch with a satisfied feeling that all was going well. Tessie spread her lunch on a drawing-table opposite me, and we drank our claret from the same bottle and lighted our cigarettes from the same match. I was much attached to Tessie. I had watched her shoot up into a slender but exquisitely formed woman from a frail, awkward child. She had posed for me during the last three years, and among all my models she was my favorite.

I knew she would do what she liked, still I did hope she would steer clear of complications, because I wished her well, and then also I had a selfish desire to retain the best model I had.

I am a Catholic. When I lis-

ten to high mass, when I sign myself, I feel that everything, including myself, is more cheerful; and when I confess, it does me good. A man who lives as much alone as I do must confess to somebody. Then, again, Sylvia was Catholic, and it was reason enough for me. But I was speaking of Tessie, which is very different. Tessie also was Catholic, and much more devout than I, so, taking it all in all, I had little fear for my pretty model until she should fall in love. But *then* I knew that fate alone would decide her future for her, and I prayed inwardly that fate would throw into her path nothing but Ed Burkes and Jimmy McCormicks, bless her sweet face!

Tessie sat blowing rings of smoke up to the ceiling and tinkling the ice in her tumbler.

"Do you know that I also had a dream last night?" I observed.

"Not about that man?" she asked, laughing.

"Exactly. A dream similar to yours, only much worse."

It was foolish and thoughtless of me to say this, but you know how little tact the average painter has.

"I MUST HAVE fallen asleep about ten o'clock," I continued, "and after a while I dreamed that I awoke. So plainly did I hear the midnight bells, the wind in the tree-branches, and the whistle of steamers from the

bay, that even now I can scarcely believe I was not awake. I seemed to be lying in a box which had a glass cover. Dimly I saw the street lamps as I passed, for I must tell you, Tessie, the box in which I reclined appeared to lie in a cushioned wagon which jolted me over a stony pavement.

"After a while I became impatient and tried to move, but the box was too narrow. My hands were crossed on my breast so I could not raise them to help myself. I listened and then tried to call. My voice was gone. I could hear the trample of the horses attached to the wagon, and even the breathing of the driver. Then another sound broke upon my ears like the raising of a window-sash.

"I managed to turn my head a little, and found I could look, not only through the glass cover of my box, but also through the glass panes in the side of the covered vehicle. I saw houses, empty and silent, with neither light nor life about any of them excepting one. In that house a window was open on the first floor and a figure all in white stood looking down into the street. It was you."

Tessie had turned her face away from me and leaned on the table with her elbow.

"I could see your face," I resumed, "and it seemed to me to be very sorrowful. Then we passed on and turned into a

narrow, black lane. Presently the horses stopped. I waited and waited, closing my eyes with fear and impatience, but all was silent as the grave. After what seemed to me hours, I began to feel uncomfortable. A sense that somebody was close to me made me uncloset my eyes. Then I saw the white face of the hearse-driver looking at me through the coffin-lid . . ."

A sob from Tessie interrupted me. She was trembling like a leaf. I saw I had made a fool of myself, and attempted to repair the damage.

"Why, Tess," I said, "I only told you to show you what influence your story might have on another person's dreams. You don't suppose I really lay in a coffin, do you? What are you trembling for? Don't you see that your dream and my unreasonable dislike for that offensive watchman of the church simply set my brain working as soon as I fell asleep?"

She laid her head between her arms and sobbed as if her heart would break. What a precious triple donkey I had made of myself! But I was about to break my record. I went over and put my arm about her.

"Tessie, dear, forgive me," I said. "I had no business to frighten you with such nonsense. You are too sensible a girl, too good a Catholic to believe in dreams."

Her hand tightened on mine

and her head fell back upon my shoulder, but she still trembled and I petted her and comforted her.

"Come, Tess, open your eyes and smile."

Her eyes opened with a slow, languid movement and met mine, but their expression was so queer that I hastened to reassure her again.

"It's all humbug, Tessie. You surely are not afraid that any harm will come to you because of that?"

"No," she said, but her scarlet lips quivered.

"Then what's the matter? Are you afraid?"

"Yes. Not for myself."

"For me, then?" I demanded, gayly.

"For you," she murmured, in a voice almost inaudible. "I — I care for you."

At first I started to laugh, but when I understood her a shock passed through me, and I sat like one turned to stone. This was the crowning bit of idiocy I had committed. During the moment which elapsed between her reply and my answer I thought of a thousand responses to that innocent confession. I could pass it by with a laugh, I could misunderstand her and reassure her as to my health, I could simply point out that it was impossible she could love me. But my reply was quicker than my thoughts, and I might think and think now when it

was too late, for I had kissed her on the mouth.

THAT EVENING I took my usual walk in Washington Park, pondering over the occurrences of the day. I was thoroughly committed. There was no back-out now, and I stared the future straight in the face. I was not good, not even scrupulous, but I had no idea of deceiving either myself or Tessie. The one passion of my life lay buried in the sunlit forests of Brittany. Was it buried forever? Hope cried "No!" For three years I had been listening to the voice of Hope, and for three years I had waited for a footstep on my threshold. Had Sylvia forgotten? "No!" cried Hope.

I said that I was not good. That is true, but still I was not exactly a comic-opera villain. I had led an easy-going, reckless life, taking what invited me of pleasure, deploring and sometimes bitterly regretting consequences. In one thing alone, except my painting, was I serious, and that was something which lay hidden if not lost in the Breton forests.

It was too late now for me to regret what had occurred during the day. Whatever it had been, pity, a sudden tenderness for sorrow, or the more brutal instinct of gratified vanity, it was all the same now, and unless I wished to bruise an innocent heart my path lay marked

before me. The fire and the strength, the depth of a love which I had never even suspected, with all my imagined experience in the world, left me no alternative but to respond or send her away.

Whether because I am so cowardly about giving pain to others, or whether it was that I have little of the gloomy Puritan in me, I do not know, but I shrank from disclaiming responsibility for that thoughtless kiss, and, in fact, had not time to do so before the gates of her heart opened and the flood poured forth. Others who habitually do their duty and find a sullen satisfaction in making themselves and everybody else unhappy, might have withstood it. I did not. I dared not.

After the storm had abated I did tell her that she might better have loved Ed Burke and worn a plain gold ring, but she would not hear of it, and I thought perhaps that as long as she had decided to love somebody she could not marry, it had better be me. I at least could treat her with an intelligent affection, and she could go none the worse for it. For I was decided on that point, although I knew how hard it would be.

She would either tire of the whole thing, or become so unhappy that I should have either to marry her or go away. If I married her we would be unhappy. I with a wife unsuited

to me, and she with a husband unsuitable for any woman. If I went away she might either fall ill, recover, and marry some Eddie Burke, or she might recklessly or deliberately go and do something foolish. On the other hand, if she tired of my friendship then her whole life would be before her with beautiful vistas of Eddie Burkes and marriage rings, and twins, and Harlem flats, and Heaven knows what.

AS I STROLLED along through the trees by the Washington Arch, I decided that she should find a substantial friend in me anyway, and the future could take care of itself. Then I went into the house and put on my evening dress, for the little faintly perfumed note on my dresser said, "Have a cab at the stage door at eleven," and the note was signed, "Edith Carmichel, Metropolitan Theater."

I took supper that night, or, rather, we took supper, Miss Carmichel and I, at Solari's and the dawn was just beginning to gild the cross on the Memorial Church as I entered Washington Square after leaving Edith at the Brunswick. There was not a soul in the park, as I passed among the trees and took the walk which leads from the Garibaldi statue to the Hamilton apartment house, but as I passed the churchyard I saw a figure sitting on the stone steps.

In spite of myself a chill crept over me at the sight of the white, puffy face, and I hastened to pass. Then he said something which might have been addressed to me or might merely have been a mutter to himself, but a sudden furious anger flamed up within me that such a creature should address me.

For an instant I felt like wheeling about and smashing my stick over his head, but I walked on, and, entering the Hamilton, went to my apartment. For some time I tossed about the bed trying to get the sound of his voice out of my ears, but could not. It filled my head, that muttering sound, like thick, oily smoke from a fat-rendering vat or an odor of noisome decay. And as I lay and tossed about, the voice in my ears seemed more distinct, and I began to understand the words he muttered. They came to me slowly, as if I had forgotten them, and at last I could make some sense out of the sounds. It was this:

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

"Have you found the Yellow Sign?"

I was furious. What did he mean by that? Then with a curse upon him and his I rolled over and went to sleep, but when I awoke later I looked

pale and haggard, for I had dreamed the dream of the night before, and it troubled me more than I cared to think.

I dressed and went down into my studio. Tessie sat by the window, but as I came in she rose and put both arms around my neck for an innocent kiss. She looked so sweet and dainty that I kissed her again.

I said, "We will begin something new"; and I went into my wardrobe and picked out a Moorish costume which fairly blazed with tinsel. It was a genuine costume, and Tessie retired to the screen with it, enchanted. When she came forth again I was astonished. Her long, black hair was bound above her forehead with a circlet of turquoise. Her feet were encased in the embroidered, pointed slippers, and the skirt of her costume, curiously wrought with arabesques in silver, and the short Mauresque jacket, spangled and sewn with turquoises, became her wonderfully. She came up to me and held up her face, smiling. I slipped my hand into my pocket, and, drawing out a gold chain with a cross attached, dropped it over her head.

"It's yours, Tessie."

"Mine?" she faltered.

"Yours. Now go and pose."

Then with a radiant smile she ran behind the screen, presently reappeared with a little box on which was written my name.

"I had intended to give it to

you when I went home tonight," she said, "but I can't wait now."

I opened the box. On the pink cotton inside lay a clasp of black onyx, on which was inlaid a curious symbol or letter in gold. It was neither Arabic nor Chinese, nor, as I found afterwards, did it belong to any human script.

"It's all I had to give you for a keepsake," she said, timidly.

I was annoyed, but I told her how much I should prize it, and promised to wear it always. She fastened it on my coat beneath the lapel.

"How foolish, Tess, to go and buy me such a beautiful thing as this," I said.

"I did not buy it," she laughed.

"Where did you get it?"

Then she told me how she found it one day while coming from the aquarium in the Battery, how she had advertised it and watched the papers, but at last gave up all hopes of finding the owner.

"That was last winter," she said, "the very day I had the first horrid dream about the hearse."

### 3

The day following was a disastrous one for me. While moving a framed canvas from one easel to another my foot slipped on the polished floor and I fell heavily on both wrists. They

were so badly sprained that it was useless to attempt to hold a brush, and I was obliged to wander about the studio, glaring at unfinished drawings and sketches, until despair seized me and I sat down to smoke and twiddle my thumbs with rage. The rain blew against the windows and rattled on the roof of the church, driving me into a nervous fit with its interminable patter.

Tessie sat sewing by the window, and every now and then raised her head and looked at me with such innocent compassion that I began to feel ashamed of my irritation and looked about for something to occupy me. I had read all the papers and all the books in the library, but for the sake of something to do I went to the bookcases and shoved them open with my elbow. I knew every volume by its color and examined them all, passing slowly around the library and whistling to keep up my spirits.

I was turning to go into the dining room when my eye fell upon a book bound in serpent-skin standing in a corner of the top shelf of the last bookcase. I did not remember it, and from the floor could not decipher the pale lettering on the back, so I went to the smoking-room and called Tessie. She came in from the studio and climbed up to reach the book.

"What is it?" I asked.



"The King in Yellow."

I was dumbfounded. Who had placed it there? How came it in my rooms? I had long ago decided that I should never open that book, and nothing on earth could have persuaded me to buy it. Fearful lest curiosity might tempt me to open it, I had never even looked at it in bookstores. If I ever had had any curiosity to read it, the awful tragedy of young Castaigne, whom I knew, prevented me from exploring its wicked pages. I had always refused to listen to any description of it, and, indeed, nobody ever ventured to discuss the second part aloud, so I had absolutely no knowledge of what those leaves might reveal. I stared at the poisonous, mottled binding as I would at a snake.

"Don't touch it, Tessie," I said. "Come down."

Of course my admonition was enough to arouse her curiosity, and before I could prevent it she took the book, and, laughing, danced off into the studio with it. I called her, but she slipped away with a tormenting smile at my helpless hands, and I followed her with some impatience.

"Tessie!" I cried, entering the library, "listen. I am serious. Put that book away. I do not wish you to open it!" The library was empty. I went into both drawing-rooms, then into the bedrooms, laundry, kitchen, and fin-

ally returned to the library and began a systematic search. She had hidden herself so well that it was half an hour later when I discovered her crouching white and silent by the latticed window in the storeroom above. At the first glance I saw she had been punished for her foolishness. "The King in Yellow" lay at her feet, but the book was open at the second part.

I looked at Tessie and saw it was too late. She had opened "The King in Yellow." Then I took her by the hand and led her into the studio. She seemed dazed, and when I told her to lie down on the sofa she obeyed me without a word. After a while she closed her eyes and her breathing became regular and deep; but I could not determine whether or not she slept. For a long while I sat silently beside her, but she neither stirred nor spoke, and at last I rose and, entering the unused storeroom, took the book in my least injured hand. It seemed heavy as lead; but I carried it into the studio again, and, sitting down on the rug beside the sofa, opened it and read it through from beginning to end.

When, faint with the excess of my emotions, I dropped the volume and leaned wearily back against the sofa, Tessie opened her eyes and looked at me.

WE HAD BEEN speaking for some time in a dull, monot-

onous strain before I realized that we were discussing "The King in Yellow." Oh, the sin of writing such words — words which are clear as crystal, limpid and musical as bubbling springs, words which sparkle and glow like the poisoned diamonds of the Medicis! Oh the wickedness, the hopeless damnation, of a soul who could fascinate and paralyze human creatures with such words — words understood by the ignorant and wise alike, words which are more precious than jewels, more soothing than music, more awful than death!

We talked on, unmindful of the gathering shadows, and she was begging me to throw away the clasp of black onyx quaintly inlaid with what we now knew to be the Yellow Sign. I shall never know why I refused, though even at this hour, here in my bedroom as I write this confession, I should be glad to know *what* it was that prevented me from tearing the Yellow Sign from my breast and casting it into the fire. I am sure I wished to do so, and yet Tessie pleaded with me in vain.

Night fell, and the hours dragged on, but still we murmured to each other of the King and the Pallid Mask, and midnight sounded from the misty spires in the fog-wrapped city. We spoke of Hatur and of Cassilda, while outside the fog rolled against the blank win-

dow-panes as the cloud waves roll and break on the shores of Hali.

The house was very silent now, and not a sound came up from the misty streets. Tessie lay among the cushions, her face a gray blot in the gloom, but her hands were clasped in mine, and I knew that she knew and read my thoughts as I read hers, for we had understood the mystery of the Hyades, and the Phantom of Truth was laid. Then, as we answered each other, swiftly, silently, thought on thought, the shadows stirred in the gloom about us, and far in the distant streets we heard a sound.

Nearer and nearer it came — the dull crunching of wheels, nearer and yet nearer, and now, outside, before the door, it ceased, and I dragged myself to the window and saw a black-plumed hearse. The gate below opened and shut, and I crept, shaking, to my door, and bolted it, but I knew no bolts, no locks, could keep that creature out who was coming for the Yellow Sign. And now I heard him moving very softly along the hall. Now he was at the door, and the bolts rotted at his touch. Now he had entered. With eyes starting from my head I peered into the darkness, but when he came into the room I did not see him. It was only when I felt him envelop me in his cold, soft grasp that I

cried out and struggled with deadly fury, but my hands were useless, and he tore the onyx clasp from my coat and struck me full in the face.

Then, as I fell, I heard Tessie's soft cry and her spirit fled; and even while falling I longed to follow her, for I knew that the King in Yellow had opened his tattered mantle and there was only God to cry to now.

I could tell more, but I cannot see what help it will be to the world. As for me, I am past human help or hope. As I lie here, writing, careless even whether or not I die before I finish, I can see the doctor gathering up his powders and phials with a vague gesture to the good priest beside me, which I understand.

They will be very curious to know the tragedy — they of the outside world who write books and print millions of newspapers, but I shall write no more, and the father confessor will

seal my last words with the seal of sanctity when his holy office is done. They of the outside world may send their creatures into wrecked homes and death-smitten firesides, and their newspapers will batten on blood and tears, but with me their spies must halt before the confessional.

They know that Tessie is dead, and that I am dying. They know how the people in the house, aroused by an infernal scream, rushed into my room, and found one living and two dead, but they do not know what I shall tell them now; they do not know that the doctor said, as he pointed to a horrible, decomposed heap on the floor — the livid corpse of the watchman from the church: "I have no theory, no explanation. That man must have been dead for months!"

I think I am dying. I wish the priest would . . .



# The Maze And The Monster

by Edward D. Hoch

*While Edward D. Hoch has written some fantasy and science fiction, the bulk of his work has been in the field of the detective and crime story — but with a difference. The strange, the eerie, the grotesque, the forgotten legend and obscure, horrifying fact have nearly always played a considerable part in his accounts of crime, detection, and justice; while the occasional, required genuflections to formula were rarely more than perfunctory. Hoch likes to open a story with a familiar, even commonplace situation in life or fiction, and then proceed with his own very individual twist . . .*

THE TANGLED CHAIN of half-forgotten events which had carried William Nellis from a comfortable existence on London's West End to the wild waters off the Atlantic Coast of North Africa were such that even he would have been hard pressed to explain his presence that bleak December day in the middle of a sandy beach so far from home. The ship he'd come

on had floundered in a storm the day before, and now he alone of all the crew seemed to have safely reached the shelter of this island. The ship itself was no longer on the horizon. Perhaps it had been carried to the bottom; more likely, the crew had regained control after the storm passed and sailed on without him.

In any event, he was not to be

alone on the beach for long. Two men wearing a sort of greenish uniform unfamiliar to him appeared from the underbrush, leveling rifles of a type he'd imagined were obsolete fifty years ago. They spoke in Spanish, a language he hardly knew, but their commands were obvious. He was a prisoner, captured on the beach of an island he hardly knew existed, by men who spoke a different language. And within an hour he found himself cast into the darkness of a cell in the far interior of the island, without food or water or any clothing but the tattered remains of his seagoing garments.

He remained in the dungeon — for it was nothing more than that — for more than a day, until his thirst was such that he'd taken to licking water from the walls where it trickled down in the darkness from some dampness unseen above. Then, without warning, the guards came for him again. This time he was taken down a long passageway that seemed to connect the prison with a sort of palace, a vast glistening sparkle of a place that reminded him of those old pictures of Versailles in the days of Saint-Simon. The guards led him into a high-ceilinged chamber at the end of which sat an elderly man who gave every evidence of being strong and active despite his years. His face was deeply tanned, almost

brown, and the whiteness of his wrinkled hair gave to the whole head an air of motion, of matter arrested but momentarily. The man might have been a conqueror or a prime minister. He was most certainly a ruler.

"Good evening," he said quietly, speaking in English with just a trace of Spanish accent. "Welcome to the Island of Snails."

"My ship lost me," Nellis started to explain. "The storm . . ."

"No need for explanations." The other held up his hand. "We are always anxious to have visitors here."

"This is your island?"

"Quite correct. I am Captain Cortez, direct descendant of the Spanish conqueror. My island, my people. I own everything you can see."

"I'd be very pleased if you could arrange transportation for me back to the mainland," Nellis said, with a growing tension in the pit of his stomach. There was something about this place and this man which struck fear into him, a fear he had not even felt during his day in the dungeon.

"Well," the white-haired man answered slowly, "that would be a bit difficult at this time. I think you'd better plan to remain with us here."

Nellis took a step forward and immediately the guards

were upon him. "What in hell is this? Am I a prisoner?"

The Spaniard's eyes sparkled like the jeweled chandelier overhead. "Yes, you are a prisoner! You are a prisoner because you dared to set foot on my island!" Then, to the guards, "Take him away! Talk is of no use with scum like this. Prepare the maze for him!"

Nellis struggled in the grip of the guards. "You're a madman. I'm not staying here any longer." But then there was a thudding blow to his temple, and he was falling, into a blackness of unknowing, into a dream of madness that was not a dream . . .

AND WHEN HE awakened, with a splatter of icy water across his face, he found himself in a place far below the ground, where the air was chilled by a dampness that clutched at his bones. The guards were there, and the man named Cortez, and ahead of them was only a long passageway, lit by torches such as one might find in the tunnels of the pyramids or the catacombs of Rome.

"Have they removed the last one?" Cortez asked.

"They are in there now, getting him."

"Very good." He turned to look down at Nellis. "This is a maze," he explained carefully, "built for me at great expense out of the earth and solid rock

in spots. It has about two miles of passageways. You will enter through here, and the door will be sealed behind you. Thereafter, you will come upon one of two possible exits to the maze. At one exit you will find a paradise of pleasure beyond your wildest dreams. At the other, a . . . what shall I say? . . . a monster."

As if on cue, two uniformed guards emerged from the passageway, carrying between them a stretcher heavy with the weight of what had once been a man. The body, stripped of clothing, was torn and ripped as if by a tiger or other great beast. There was hardly a square inch of skin area unmarked by the violence of the assault. The man had died, horribly, back there in the maze.

"You're insane," Nellis told the Spaniard.

"Perhaps. Actually, the idea for this was suggested by a countryman of yours named Stockton — is that the name? Yes, Stockton. He wrote a story called *The Lady or the Tiger?* which has fascinated me ever since my youth."

"Stockton was an American," Nellis corrected, though at the moment it seemed to make very little difference. "And you're still crazy."

"Enough talk. I wish you good luck and a safe return — a safe journey to paradise or a quick death in the monster's

claws. I advise you to keep moving. It is cold in the maze, and I know you are hungry. We would not want you to die of starvation."

"Don't I even get a weapon to defend myself?"

"Your weapons are your hands, though they will be quite useless if you should come upon our monster. Now, into the maze with you!"

The guards tore away what remained of his shredded clothing and cast him a few feet into the passageway. Almost immediately, a door of thin steel slid quietly in to place, blocking out the sight of the smiling Captain Cortez. But though the passage was dim, there seemed to be a flicker of light from somewhere up ahead. Nellis hurried toward it, knowing full well that neither monster nor paradise could lurk that close to the beginning. What he found was a torch burning in the wall, and he pried it free of its metal bracket. It was some weapon at least, against the monster, and it also gave him light.

He went on, quite openly at first, holding the torch high and carefully avoiding the occasional pebbles that might threaten the bareness of his feet. After walking some fifty feet farther on he came to a branching of the maze and his first decision. He decided on the right-hand passageway, and

carefully made an X on the floor of the passageway with the butt of his torch, so he would know if he passed this way again while going in circles. Then he moved on, slower this time, holding the torch high above his head.

The walls here were of smooth stone, but the ground underneath seemed mostly of dirt. He imagined Cortez laboring on the maze for so many months or years, pouring a fortune into the construction of the thing, and anticipating the coming torments of the men who might be his prisoners. Nellis remembered the horribly torn body they'd carried out of the maze, and wondered if there really was a safe way out. Wouldn't it be more in keeping with the madness of Cortez to have every passageway lead to the monster?

A low roaring sound suddenly filled the tunnel, and he froze every muscle. An animal — the monster? Or perhaps only the rushing of water somewhere? After a moment he continued walking, but more slowly still. Maybe he should simply sit down against the wall, wait for starvation to overtake him. But what if the monster came prowling, found him in a weakened condition with no chance to defend himself? No, it was better to go on, while some slight hope remained.

He came to another branch-

ing of the maze, this time with three narrower passages leading off the main one. Again he chose the one on the far right and made his X on the ground. He'd remembered reading somewhere that one method of solving a maze — at least on paper — was always to follow one wall of it. Though it might not be the shortest path, sooner or later you would find the exit. Of course such magazine-made mazes did not include a monster that might lurk around any turning.

He seemed so far away from London then, so far away that memory itself was difficult for him. This might have been another world, another lifetime, an existence cut off from all reality except the reality of the pebbles beneath his feet and the chill dampness of the passage.

Suddenly, without warning, a gust of cold air filled the tunnel, blowing out the flame of his torch like a puff of some giant mouth. He cursed silently and then went on. The deadened torch could still serve as a club, at least, though he would have to travel much slower now, feeling his way along the cool stone wall of the maze. He decided he would stick with the right-hand wall, and hope for the best.

Aware, too aware, of the sweat forming even on his icy flesh, he wandered the maze for

what seemed like hours. Once he hit out at something that might have been a rat, scurrying across his left foot. And again once he heard the howling cry of the beast, or the wind, reverberating through the maze, almost seeming to seek him out. The seconds, minutes, hours went by; the hunger grew within him like a physical presence; and still he kept moving along the right wall, aware now and then of other dark tunnels branching off, aware too of occasional hints of movement close at hand. Rats, perhaps again, or something stalking him like a tiger in the doubt-filled dark. If only he knew the nature of the monster, then at least the fear that welled within him might be lessened.

Then, ahead, he thought he saw a flicker of light. Was it possible? Had he reached one of the maze's two exits, or would he find only another torch flaming on the wall. He went forward more slowly than ever, careful lest his bare toes might hit some pebble and send out a click of warning. Slowly, slowly . . .

He rounded the last corner and found himself in a high-ceilinged room lit by a score of torches. There were vivid red couches here, and ferns and drapes that made the whole thing seem like a great room overlooking the sea. And, standing in the very center of the



chamber, a woman of such beauty that she left him breathless. A woman tall and sleek and raven-haired, wearing a garment of gold that fell loosely from one lovely shoulder. She held out her arms to him, and he dropped his stump of expired torch and ran forward, the hunger of his stomach forgotten now.

"Thank God," he mumbled, flinging himself into her arms. "I never thought I'd find the way out. I never thought . . ."

"You're with me now," she said, and her voice was as smooth as honey.

"I've fooled him," he gasped out. "I've defeated Cortez and his maze. I've found his paradise . . ."

He stopped because her fingers had pressed against a nerve and he could neither move nor speak, nor close his eyes. Her face was only inches from him as answered, "Oh, no! You don't seem to understand. You found the monster."

He had only time to see the madness deep within her eyes before her blood-red fingernails ripped across his eyeballs. Then there was nothing. Nothing but endless pain . . .

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In the very first issue of **Weird Tales**, appeared a story about a protoplasmic monster, by the late Anthony Rud. The title was "Ooze". Edward D. Hoch had not read this story, and the manuscript he sent us, entitled "Ooze", while dealing with a monster, was nothing like Mr. Rud's grisly creation. This is subtly different from any other "monster" tale you have ever read; and while we do not think that we will use Hoch's title, we intend to offer this story to you in our next issue.

Meanwhile, Mr. Hoch's articles appear regularly in our companion magazine, **Exploring The Unknown**: the current issue carries an account of predictions of the end of the world, "Something In The Stars".

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# The Death of Halpin Frayser

by Ambrosè Bierce

*Despite his fondness for the crudest of melodramatic clichés in dialogue and story line, Ambrose Bierce had a unique style, a vehicle for unparalleled bitterness, cynicism, mordant humor, and sheer horror. The grotesque element is often made more effective by the banality upon which it is imposed. As one critic puts it, "He aims to make mincemeat of all civilized humanity . . .". The present story is from his collection entitled "Can Such Things Be?" and the occasional lapses into the worst taste of the period cannot downgrade the superb artistry that surrounds it and permeates the whole.*

For by death is wrought greater change than hath been shown. Whereas in general the spirit that removed cometh back upon occasion, and is sometimes seen of those in flesh (appearing in the form of the body it bore) yet it hath happened that the veritable body without the spirit hath walked. And it is attested of those encountering who have lived to speak thereon that a lich so raised up hath no natural affection, nor remembrance thereof, but only hate. Also, it is known that some spirits which in life were benign become by death evil altogether. — *Halil.*

ONE DARK NIGHT in mid-summer a man waking from a dreamless sleep in a forest lifted his head from the earth, and staring a few moments into the blackness, said: "Catherine Larue." He said nothing more; no reason was known to him why he should have said so much.

The man was Halpin Frayser. He lived in St. Helena, but where he lives now is uncertain, for he is dead. One who prac-

tices sleeping in the woods with nothing under him but the dry leaves and the damp earth, and nothing over him but the branches from which the leaves have fallen and the sky from which the earth has fallen, cannot hope for great longevity, and Frayser had already attained the age of thirty-two. There are persons in this world, millions of persons, and far away the best persons, who regard that as a very advanced age. They are the children. To those who view the voyage of life from the port of departure the bark that has accomplished any considerable distance appears already in close approach to the farther shore. However, it is not certain that Halpin Frayser came to his death by exposure.

He had been all day in the hills west of the Napa Valley, looking for doves and such small game as was in season. Late in the afternoon it had come on to be cloudy, and he had lost his bearings; and although he had only to go always downhill — everywhere the way to safety when one is lost — the absence of trails had so impeded him that he was overtaken by night while still in the forest. Unable in the darkness to penetrate the thickets of manzanita and other undergrowth, utterly bewildered and overcome with fatigue, he had lain down near the root of a large madrono and fallen into a dreamless sleep. It was hours

later, in the very middle of the night, that one of God's mysterious messengers, gliding ahead of the incalculable host of his companions sweeping westward with the dawn line, pronounced the awakening word in the ear of the sleeper, who sat upright and spoke, he knew not why, a name, he knew not whose.

Halpin Frayser was not much of a philosopher, nor a scientist. The circumstances that, waking from a deep sleep at night in the midst of a forest, he had spoken aloud a name that he had not in memory and hardly had in mind did not arouse an enlightened curiosity to investigate the phenomenon. He thought it odd, and with a little perfunctory shiver, as if in deference to a seasonal presumption that the night was chill, he lay down again and went to sleep. But his sleep was no longer dreamless.

He thought he was walknig along a dusty road that showed white in the gathering darkness of a summer night. Whence and whither it led, and why he traveled it, he did not know, though all seemed simple and natural, as is the way in dreams; for in the Land Beyond the Bed surprises cease from troubling and the judgment is at rest. Soon he came to a parting of the ways; leading from the highway was a road less traveled, having the appearance, indeed, of having been long abandoned,

because, he thought, it led to something evil; yet he turned into it without hesitation, impelled by some imperious necessity.

As he pressed forward he became conscious that his way was haunted by invisible existences whom he could not definitely figure to his mind. From among the trees on either side he caught broken and incoherent whispers in a strange tongue which yet he partly understood. They seemed to him fragmentary utterances of a monstrous conspiracy against his body and soul.

It was now long after nightfall, yet the interminable forest through which he journeyed was lit with a wan glimmer having no point of diffusion, for in its mysterious lumination nothing cast a shadow. A shallow pool in the guttered depression of an old wheel rut, as from a recent rain, met his eye with a crimson gleam. He stopped and plunged his hand into it. It stained his fingers; it was blood! Blood, he then observed, was about him everywhere. The weeds growing rankly by the roadside showed it in blots and splashes on their big, broad leaves. Patches of dry dust between the wheelways were pitted and spattered as with a red rain. Defiling the trunks of the trees were broad maculations of crimson, and blood dripped like dew from their foliage.

All this he observed with a terror which seemed not incompatible with the fulfillment of a natural expectation. It seemed to him that it was all in expiation of some crime which, he could not rightly remember. To the menaces and mysteries of his surroundings the consciousness was an added horror. Vainly he sought by tracing life backward in memory, to reproduce the moment of his sin; scenes and incidents came crowding tumultuously into his mind, one picture effacing another, or commingling with it in confusion and obscurity, but nowhere could he catch a glimpse of what he sought. The failure augmented his terror; he felt as one who has murdered in the dark, not knowing whom nor why. So frightful was the situation — the mysterious light burned with so silent and awful a menace; the noxious plants, the trees that by common consent are invested with a melancholy or baleful character, so openly in his sight conspired against his peace; from overhead and all about came so audible and startling whispers and the sighs of creatures so obviously not of earth — that he could endure it no longer, and with a great effort to break some malign spell that bound his faculties to silence and inaction, he shouted with the full strength of his lungs! His voice broken, it seemed, into an in-

finite multitude of unfamiliar sounds, went babbling and stammering away into the distant reaches of the forest, died into silence, and all was as before. But he had made a beginning at resistance and was encouraged. He said:

"I will not submit unheard. There may be powers that are not malignant traveling this accursed road. I shall leave them a record and an appeal. I shall relate my wrongs, the persecutions that I endure — I, a helpless mortal, a penitent, an unoffending poet!" Halpin Frayser was a poet only as he was a penitent: in his dream.

Taking from his clothing a small red-leather pocketbook, one-half of which was leaved for memoranda, he discovered that he was without a pencil. He broke a twig from a bush, dipped it into a pool of blood and wrote rapidly. He had hardly touched the paper with the point of his twig when a low, wild peal of laughter broke out at a measureless distance away, and growing ever louder, seemed approaching ever nearer; a soulless, heartless, and unjoyous laugh, like that of the loon, solitary by the lakeside at midnight; a laugh which culminated in an unearthly shout close at hand, then died away by slow gradations, as if the accursed being that uttered it had withdrawn over the verge

of the world whence it had come. But the man felt that this was not so — that it was near by and had not moved.

A strange sensation began slowly to take possession of his body and his mind. He could not have said which, if any, of his senses was affected; he felt it rather as a consciousness — a mysterious mental assurance of some overpowering presence — some supernatural malevolence different in kind from the invisible existences that swarmed about him, and superior to them in power. He knew that it had uttered that hideous laugh. And now it seemed to be approaching him, from what direction he did not know — dared not conjecture. All his former fears were forgotten or merged in the gigantic terror that now held him in thrall. Apart from that, he had but one thought: to complete his written appeal to the benign powers who, traversing the haunted wood, might some time rescue him if he should be denied the blessing of annihilation. He wrote with terrible rapidity, the twig in his fingers rilling blood without renewal; but in the middle of a sentence his hands denied their service to his will, his arms fell to his sides, the book to the earth; and powerless to move or cry out, he found himself staring into the sharply drawn face and blank dead eyes of his own mother,

standing white and silent in the garments of the gravel

## 2

IN HIS YOUTH Halpin Frayser had lived with his parents in Nashville, Tennessee. The Fraysers were well-to-do, having a good position in such society as had survived the wreck wrought by civil war. Their children had the social and educational opportunities of their time and place, and had responded to good associations and instruction with agreeable manners and cultivated minds. Halpin being the youngest and not over robust was perhaps a trifle "spoiled." He had the double disadvantage of a mother's assiduity and a father's neglect. Frayser *pere* was what no Southern man of means is not — a politician. His country, or rather his section and State, made demands upon his time and attention so exacting that to those of his family he was compelled to turn an ear partly deafened by the thunder of the political captains and the shouting, his own included.

Young Halpin was of a dreamy, indolent and rather romantic turn, somewhat more addicted to literature than law, the profession to which he was bred. Among those of his relations who professed the modern faith heredity it was well understood that in him the character

of the late Myron Bayne, a maternal great-grandfather, had revisited the glimpses of the moon — by which orb Bayne had in his lifetime been sufficiently affected to be a poet of no small Colonial distinction. If not specially observed, it was observable that while a Frayser who was not the proud possessor of a sumptuous copy of the ancestral "poetical works" (printed at the family expense, and long ago withdrawn from an inhospitable market) was a rare Frayser indeed, there was an illogical indisposition to honor the great deceased in the person of his spiritual successor. Halpin was pretty generally deprecated as an intellectual black sheep who was likely at any moment to disgrace the flock by bleating in meter. The Tennessee Fraysers were a practical folk — not practical in the popular sense of devotion to sordid pursuits, but having a robust contempt for any qualities unfitting a man for the wholesome vocation of politics.

In justice to young Halpin it should be said that while in him were pretty faithfully reproduced most of the mental and moral characteristics ascribed by history and family tradition to the famous Colonial bard, his succession to the gift and faculty divine were purely inferential. Not only had he never been known to court the muse, but in truth he could not

have written correctly a line of verse to save himself from the Killer of the Wise. Still, there was no knowing when the dormant faculty might wake and smite the lyre.

In the meantime the young man was rather a loose fish, anyhow. Between him and his mother was the most perfect sympathy, for secretly the lady was herself a devout disciple of the late and great Myron Bayne, though with the tact so generally and justly admired in her sex (despite the hardy calumniators who insist that it is essentially the same thing as cunning) she had always taken care to conceal her weakness from all eyes but those of him who shared it. Their common guilt in respect of that was an added tie between them. If in Halpin's youth his mother had "spoiled" him, he had assuredly done his part toward being spoiled. As he grew to such manhood as is attainable by a Southerner who does not care which way elections go the attachment between him and his beautiful mother — whom from early childhood he had called Katy — became yearly stronger and more tender. In these two romantic natures was manifest in a signal way that neglected phenomenon, the dominance of the sexual element in all the relations of life, strengthening, softening, and beautifying even those of consanguinity. The two were near-

ly inseparable, and by strangers observing their manner were not infrequently mistaken for lovers.

Entering his mother's boudoir one day Halpin Frayser kissed her upon the forehead, toyed for a moment with a lock of her dark hair which had escaped from its confining pins, and said, with an obvious effort at calmness, "Would you greatly mind, Katy, if I were called away to California for a few weeks?"

It was hardly needful for Katy to answer with her lips a question to which her telltale cheeks had made instant reply. Evidently she would greatly mind; and the tears, too, sprang into her large brown eyes as corroborative testimony.

"Ah, my son," she said, looking up into his face with infinite tenderness, "I should have known that this was coming. Did I not lie awake a half of the night weeping because, during the other half, Grandfather Bayne had come to me in a dream, and standing by his portrait — young, too, and handsome as that — pointed to yours on the same wall? And when I looked it seemed that I could not see the features. You had been painted with a face cloth, such as we put upon the dead. Your father has laughed at me, but you and I, dear, know that such things are not for nothing. And I saw below the edge of the

cloth the marks of hands on your throat — forgive me, but we have not been used to keep such things from each other. Perhaps you have another interpretation. Perhaps it does not mean that you will go to California. Or maybe you will take me with you?"

It must be confessed that this ingenious interpretation of the dream in the light of newly discovered evidence did not wholly commend itself to the son's more logical mind; he had, for the moment at least, a conviction that it foreshadowed a more simple and immediate, if less tragic, disaster than a visit to the Pacific Coast. It was Halpin Frayser's impression that he was to be garroted on his native heath.

"Are there not medicinal springs in California?" Mrs. Frayser resumed before he had time to give her the true reading of the dream — "places where one recovers from rheumatism and neuralgia? Look — my fingers feel so stiff, and I am almost sure they have been giving me great pain while I slept."

She held out her hands for his inspection. What diagnosis of her case the young man may have thought it best to conceal with a smile the historian is unable to state, but for himself he feels bound to say that fingers looking less stiff, and showing fewer evidences of even insensible pain, have seldom been sub-

mitted for medical inspection by even the fairest patient desiring a prescription of unfamiliar scenes.

The outcome of it was that these two odd persons having equally odd notions of duty, the one went to California, as the interest of his client required, and the other remained at home in compliance with a wish that her husband was scarcely conscious of entertaining.

While in San Francisco Halpin Frayser was walking one dark night along the water front of the city, when, with a suddenness that surprised him, he became a sailor. He was in fact "shanghaied" aboard a gallant, gallant ship, and sailed for a far countree. Nor did his misfortunes end with the voyage; for the ship was cast ashore on an island of the South Pacific, and it was six years afterward when the survivors were taken off by a venturesome trading schooner and brought back to San Francisco.

Though poor in purse, Frayser was no less proud in spirit than he had been in the years that seemed ages and ages ago. He would accept no assistance from strangers, and it was while living with a fellow survivor near the town of St. Helena, awaiting news and remittances from home, that he had gone gunning and dreaming.



## 3

THE APPARITION confronting the dreamer in the haunted wood — the thing so like, yet so unlike his mother — was horrible! It stirred no love nor longing in his heart; it came unattended with pleasant memories of a golden past — inspired no sentiment of any kind; all the finer emotions were swallowed up in fear. He tried to turn and run from before it, but his legs were as lead; he was unable to lift his feet from the ground. His arms hung helpless at his sides; of his eyes only he retained control, and these he dared not remove from the lusterless orbs of the apparition, which he knew was not a soul without a body, but that most dreadful of all existences infesting that haunted wood — a body without a soul! In its blank stare was neither love, nor pity, nor intelligence — nothing to which to address an appeal for mercy. "An appeal will not lie," he thought, with an absurd reversion to professional slang, making the situation more horrible, as the fire on a cigar might light up a tomb.

For a time, which seemed so long that the world grew gray with age and sin, and the haunted forest, having fulfilled its purpose in this monstrous culmination of its terrors, vanished out of his consciousness with all its sights and sounds, the appar-

ition stood within a pace, regarding him with mindless malevolence of a wild brute; then thrust its hands forward and sprang upon him with appalling ferocity! The act released his physical energies without unfettering his will; his mind was still spellbound, but his powerful body and agile limbs, endowed with a blind insensate life of their own, resisted stoutly and well. For an instant he seemed to see this unnatural contest between a dead intelligence and a breathing mechanism only as a spectator — such fancies are in dreams; then he regained his body, and the straining automaton had a directing will as alert and fierce as that of its hideous antagonist.

But what mortal can cope with a creature of his dream? The imagination creating the enemy is already vanquished; the combat's result is the combat's cause. Despite his struggles — despite his strength and activity, which seemed wasted in a void, he felt the cold fingers close upon his throat. Borne backward to the earth, he saw above him the dead and drawn face within a hand's breadth of his own, and then all was black. A sound as of the beating of distant drums — a murmur of swarming voices, a sharp, far cry signing all to silence, and Halpin Frayser dreamed that he was dead.

A WARM, CLEAR night had been followed by a morning of drenching fog. At about the middle of the afternoon of the preceding day a little whiff of light vapor — a mere thickening of the atmosphere, the ghost of a cloud — had been observed clinging to the western side of Mount St. Helena, away up along the barren altitudes near the summit. It was so thin, so diaphanous, so like a fancy made visible, that one would have said, "Look quickly! in a moment it will be gone."

In a moment it was visibly larger and denser. While with one edge it clung to the mountain, with the other it reached farther and farther out into the air above the lower slopes. At the same time it extended itself to north and south, joining small patches of mist that appeared to come out of the mountainside on exactly the same level, with an intelligent design to be absorbed. And so it grew and grew until the summit was shut out of view from the valley, and over the valley itself was an ever-extending canopy, opaque and gray. At Calistoga, which lies near the head of the valley and the foot of the mountain, there were a starless night and a sunless morning. The fog, sinking into the valley, had reached southward, swallowing up ranch after ranch, until it

had blotted out the town of St. Helena, nine miles away. The dust in the road was laid; trees were adrip with moisture; birds sat silent in their coverts; the morning light was wan and ghastly, with neither color nor fire.

Two men left the town of St. Helena at the first glimmer of dawn, and walked along the road northward up the valley toward Calistoga. They carried guns on their shoulders, yet no one having knowledge of such matters could have mistaken them for hunters of bird or beast. They were a deputy sheriff from Napa and a detective from San Francisco — Holker and Jaralson, respectively. Their business was manhunting.

"How far is it?" inquired Holker, as they strode along, their feet stirring white the dust beneath the damp surface of the road.

"The White Church? Only a half mile farther," the other answered. "By the way," he added, "it is neither white nor a church. It is an abandoned schoolhouse, gray with age and neglect. Religious services were once held in it — when it was white, and there is a graveyard that would delight a poet. Can you guess why I sent for you, and told you to come heeled?"

"Oh, I never have bothered you about things of that kind. I've always found you communicative when the time came.

But if I may hazard a guess, you want me to help you arrest one of the corpses in the graveyard."

"You remember Branscom?" said Jaralson, treating his companion's wit with the inattention that it deserved.

"The chap who cut his wife's throat? I ought to. I wasted a week's work on him and had my expenses for my trouble. There is a reward of five hundred dollars, but none of us ever got a sight of him. You don't mean to say . . ."

"Yes, I do. He has been under the noses of you fellows all the time. He comes by night to the old graveyard at the White Church."

"The devil! That's where they buried his wife."

"Well, you fellows might have had sense enough to suspect that he would return to her grave some time."

"The very last place that anyone would have expected him to return to."

"But you had exhausted all the other places. Learning your failure at them, I 'laid for him' there."

"And you found him?"

"Damn it! he found *me*. The rascal got the drop on me — regularly held me up and made me travel. It's God's mercy that he didn't go through me. Oh, he's a good one, and I fancy the half of that reward is enough for me if you're needy."

Holker laughed good humor-

edly, and explained that his creditors were never more importunate.

"I wanted merely to show you," the detective explained. "I thought it as well for us to be heeled, even in daylight."

"The man must be insane," said the deputy sheriff. "The reward is for his capture and conviction. If he's mad he won't be convicted."

Mr. Holker was so profoundly affected by that possible failure of justice that he involuntarily stopped in the middle of the road, then resumed his walk with abated zeal.

"Well, he looks it," assented Jaralson. "I'm bound to admit that a more unshaven, unshorn, unkempt, and uneverything wretch I never saw outside the ancient and honorable order of tramps. But I've gone in for him, and can't make up my mind to let go. There's glory in it for us, anyhow. Not another soul knows that he is this side of the Mountains of the Moon."

"All right," Holker said. "We will go and view the ground," and he added, in the words of a once favorite inscription for tombstones: 'where you must shortly lie' — I mean, if old Branscom ever gets tired of you and your impertinent intrusion. By the way, I heard the other day that 'Branscom' was not his real name."

"What is?"

"I can't recall it. I had lost

all interest in the wretch, and it did not fix itself in my memory — something like Pardee. The woman whose throat he had the bad taste to cut was a widow when he met her. She had come to California to look up some relatives — there are persons who will do that sometimes. But you know all that."

"Naturally."

"But not knowing the right name, by what happy inspiration did you find the right grave? The man who told me what the name was said it had been cut on the headboard."

"I don't know the right grave." Jaralson was apparently a trifle reluctant to admit ignorance of so important a point of his plan. "I have been watching about the place generally. A part of our work this morning will be to identify that grave. Here is the White Church"

For a long distance the road had been bordered by fields on both sides, but now on the left there was a forest of oaks, madrones, and gigantic spruces whose lower parts only could be seen, dim and ghostly in the fog. The undergrowth was, in places, thick, but nowhere impenetrable. For some moments Holker saw nothing of the building, but as they turned into the woods it revealed itself in faint gray outline through the fog, looking huge and far away. A few steps more, and it was within an arm's length, distinct,

dark with moisture, and insignificant in size. It had the usual country-schoolhouse form — belonged to the packingbox order of architecture; had an underpinning of stones, a moss-grown roof, and blank window spaces, whence both glass and sash had long departed. It was ruined, but not a ruin — a typical California substitute for what are known to guide-bookers abroad as "monuments of the past." With scarcely a glance at this uninteresting structure Jaralson moved on into the dripping undergrowth beyond.

"I will show you where he held me up," he said. "This is the graveyard."

Here and there among the bushes were small inclosures containing graves, sometimes no more than one. They were recognized as graves by the discolored stones or rotting boards at head and foot, leaning at all angles, some prostrate; by the ruined picket fences surrounding them; or infrequently, by the mound itself showing its gravel through the fallen leaves. In many instances nothing marked the spot where lay the vestiges of some poor mortal — who, leaving "a large circle of sorrowing friends," had been left by them in turn — except a depression in the earth, more lasting than that in the spirits of the mourners. The paths, if any paths had been, were long obliterated; trees of a consider-

able size had been permitted to grow up from the graves and thrust aside with root or branch the inclosing fences. Over all was that air of abandonment and decay which seems nowhere so fit and significant as in a village of the forgotten dead.

As the two men, Jaralson leading, pushed their way through the growth of young trees, that enterprising man suddenly stopped and brought up his shotgun to the height of his breast, uttered a low note of warning, and stood motionless, his eyes fixed upon something ahead. As well as he could, obstructed by brush, his companion, though seeing nothing, imitated the posture and so stood, prepared for what might ensue. A moment later Jaralson moved cautiously forward, the other following.

Under the branches of an enormous spruce lay the dead body of a man. Standing silent above it they noted such particulars as first strike the attention — the face, the attitude, the clothing; whatever most promptly and plainly answers the unspoken question of a sympathetic curiosity.

The body lay upon its back, the legs wide apart. One arm was thrust upward, the other outward; but the latter was bent acutely, and the hand was near the throat. Both hands were tightly clenched. The whole at-

titude was that of desperate but ineffectual resistance to — what?

Near by lay a shotgun and a game bag through the meshes of which was seen the plumage of shot birds. All about were evidences of a furious struggle; small sprouts of poison-oak were bent and denuded of leaf and bark; dead and rotting leaves had been pushed into heaps and ridges on both sides of the legs by the action of other feet than theirs; alongside the hips were unmistakable impressions of human knees.

The nature of the struggle was made clear by a glance at the dead man's throat and face. While breast and hands were white, those were purple — almost black. The shoulders lay upon a low mound, and the head was turned back at an angle otherwise impossible, the expanded eyes staring blankly backward in a direction opposite to that of the feet. From the froth filling the open mouth the tongue protruded, black and swollen. The throat showed horrible contusions; not mere fingermarks, but bruises and lacerations wrought by two strong hands that must have buried themselves in the yielding flesh, maintaining their terrible grasp until long after death. Breast, throat, face, were wet; the clothing was saturated; drops of water, condensed from the fog, studded the hair and mustache.

All this the two men observed without speaking — almost at a glance. Then Holker said, "Poor devil! he had a rough deal."

Jaralson was making a vigilant circumspection of the forest, his shotgun held in both hands and at full cock, his finger upon the trigger.

"The work of a maniac," he said, without withdrawing his eyes from the inclosing wood. "It was done by Branscom — Pardee."

Something half hidden by the disturbed leaves on the earth caught Holker's attention. It was a red-leather pocketbook. He picked it up and opened it. It contained leaves of white paper for memoranda, and upon the first leaf was the name Halpin Frayser." Written in red on several succeeding leaves — scrawled as if in haste and barely legible — were the following lines, which Holker read aloud, while his companion continued scanning the dim gray confines of their narrow world and hearing matter of apprehension in the drip of water from every burdened branch:

"Enthralled by some mysterious spell,  
I stood  
In the lit gloom of an enchanted  
wood.

The cypress there and myrtle  
twined their boughs,  
Significant, in baleful brotherhood.

"The brooding willow whispered to  
the yew;

Beneath, the deadly nightshade and  
the rue,  
With immortelles self-woven in-  
to strange  
Funereal shapes, and horrid nettles  
grew.

"No song of bird nor any drone of  
bees,  
Nor light leaf lifted by the whole-  
some breeze:  
The air was stagnant all, and  
Silence was  
A living thing that breathed among  
the trees.

"Conspiring spirits whispered in the  
gloom,  
Half-heard, the stilly secrets of the  
tomb.  
With blood the trees were all  
adrip; the leaves  
Shone in the witch-light with a ruddy  
bloom.

"I cried aloud!—the spell, unbroken  
still,  
Rested upon my spirit and my will.  
Unsouled, unheated, hopeless  
and forlorn,  
I strove with monstrous presages of  
all

"At last the viewless—"

Holker ceased reading; there was no more to read. The manuscript broke off in the middle of a line.

"That sounds like Bayne," said Jaralson, who was something of a scholar in his way. He had abated his vigilance and stood looking down at the body.

"Who's Bayne?" Holker asked rather incuriously.

"Myron Bayne, a chap who flourished in the early years of the nation — more than a cen-

tury ago. Wrote mighty dismal stuff. I have his collected works. That poem is not among them, but it must have been omitted by mistake."

"It is cold," said Holker. "Let us leave here. We must have up the coroner from Napa."

Jaralson said nothing, but made a movement in compliance. Passing the end of the slight elevation of earth upon which the dead man's head and shoulders lay, his foot struck some hard substance under the rotting forest leaves, and he took the trouble to kick it into view. It was a fallen headboard, and painted on it were the hardly decipherable words, "Catherine Larue."

"Larue, Laruel!" exclaimed Holker, with sudden animation. "Why, that is the real name of Branscom — not Pardee. And — bless my soul! how it all comes to me — the murdered woman's name had — been Frayser!"

"There is some rascally mystery here," said Detective Jaral-

son. "I hate anything of that kind."

There came to them out of the fog — seemingly from a great distance — the sound of a laugh, a low deliberate, soulless laugh, which had no more of joy than that of a hyena night-prowling in the desert; a laugh that rose by slow gradation louder and louder, clearer, more distinct and terrible, until it seemed barely outside the narrow circle of their vision; a laugh so unnatural, so unhuman, so devilish, that it filled those hardy man-hunters with a sense of dread unspeakable! They did not move their weapons nor think of them; the menace of that horrible sound was not of the kind to be met with arms. As it had grown out of silence, so now it died away; from a culminating shout which had seemed almost in their ears, it drew itself away into the distance, until its failing notes, joyless and mechanical to the last, sank to silence at a measureless remove.



# Babylon: 70 M.

by Donald A. Wollheim

*Behind the commonplace are more things than were dreamed of in Horatio's philosophy, and perhaps in ours. And what is more commonplace than a nursery jingle? Donald A. Wollheim, veteran science fiction fan, author of many novels and short stories, editor of numerous anthologies, magazines past, and books present, has some suggestions about this.*

*'How many miles to Babylon?  
Threescore miles and ten.  
Can I get there by candlelight?  
Yes, and back again.  
If your heels are nimble and  
light,  
You may get there by candle-  
light.'*

SITTING IN HIS study, by the open window, Barry Kane heard the woman in the garden of the adjoining house reading *Mother Goose* rhymes to her little girl. He hadn't been paying attention consciously; it had just been a part of the noises

of everyday living. His mind had been reflecting on the small urn he had just unpacked. But the word 'Babylon' struck his ear and sparked his attention; the little jingle jerked his mind away from the black, time-encrusted relic before him, and onto the woman's clear enunciation outside.

Barry frowned a bit, still idly turning the stone jug in his hand. Now that was an odd one, he thought. It was vaguely familiar; he supposed that he had run across it himself in his own childhood — and, as children



do, simply had listened to it for its rhythm and ignored its meaning. Like so many of Mother Goose's poems it seemed to make not much sense.

He tried to focus his attention again on the urn. He'd only unwrapped it a few minutes ago from its careful packings and sawdust. The expedition had shipped it to him from Baghdad, along with other interesting bits they had dug out of Babylon's ruins. An odd coincidence that that particular bit of nursery nonsense should have been overheard at just this time. He wondered idly if the mother outside would be surprised to know that so close to her was a piece that had just arrived from that very Babylon.

Only "threescore miles and ten" too, Barry thought. Why didn't he up and go then? Although he'd rated as an expert on the ancient civilizations of Asia Minor, actually he'd never been abroad. But now that he knew how close it was, why . . .

He shook his head sharply. What *was* he thinking about, he asked himself angrily. Daydreaming of all things! Babylon was perhaps ten thousand or more miles away from where he sat, not the mere seventy of the rhyme. He couldn't get there in a hundred candlelights, nor many times that number. But for a moment it had seemed so clear, so simple, that he'd

actually wondered why he'd never made the trip.

He smiled bleakly to himself. *Wish it really were easy.* But back to work. He took a soft brush from his desk and began to dust the little urn gently. An interesting piece. Probably not valuable, for it looked like a fairly common votary urn, as might have been found in any Babylonian household. Well . . . he amended his thoughts, studying its engraved sides, maybe not just any . . . it didn't quite fit the standard designs.

He turned it around in interest. No, it certainly didn't fit the usual patterns after all. And — why should it? If it had, the expedition wouldn't probably have bothered to air-express it to him. It had to be something they hadn't been able to classify properly, and so had hoped that he would be able to look it up in the more detailed library and references available here at the college.

So then what was it? He turned it over and squirmed uncomfortably in his seat, feeling an irritated mood come over him. He suddenly felt restless. The urn could possibly have held a votary light. It might have been possible to put a little oil in it and fire it; but it didn't quite seem to fit that bill. He bent over, looked sharply at the hollowed-out interior, poked a finger into it and scratched the side with his nail.

He looked at his fingernail with surprise. Wax. There was a slight trace of wax inside the stone urn. Maybe it was a candle-holder . . . but that, he told himself immediately, was silly. They didn't have candles in 2500 B. C.

On the other hand there was no reason to believe that the expedition had just dug it up. They might have found it for sale in some dark shop or dingy market place booth in Baghdad. It might have been used by some Iraqi for years before it found a place in the merchant's stall. There were many instances of ancient objects that had been found on the desert by wandering Arabs, who had used them for their own living purposes when they had seemed useful. Of course nowadays the Arabs were on the lookout for such stuff, to sell to the curious Westerners. But years ago, a century or two meant little in those ancient lands . . . Yes, he supposed it might have served sometime during the past four thousand years as a candlestick.

*Can I get there by candle-light?* Well, by this candlelight, maybe Babylon had indeed been only walking distance. Barry studied the engravings.

They displayed the usual Babylonian bas-relief technique: a bearded god walking stiffly, holding an object in one hand, the other raised to shield it. On the other side of the small

cylindrical urn, opposite the walking god, was a giant coiled and winged snake upon whose head rose two curving horns and from whose mouth a flame was emitted. Not unconventional, thought Barry, yet he'd never quite seen the like.

Why — the object the man was carrying was a light. Barry was astonished at this realization. The god was walking with a light in his hand. And there was something else, his expert eyes now noticed: at the back of the god's feet were tiny wings. The artist had meant to convey that the figure was moving rapidly. *If your heels are nimble and light*, Barry's mind interjected idiotically.

"Oh, stuff!" Barry said aloud, surprising himself. What *was* getting into him. He was becoming dreamy. What if the man did have winged heels? That was coincidence; you might find a hundred such examples.

What I need, Barry thought, is a little exercise. I'm getting silly sitting here on a lovely sunny day like this. My mind is falling asleep. He stood up, carefully set the little black urn down, started for the door. At the door he stopped, paused a moment with an odd feeling that there must be something better to do than walking, then finally left his study, closed the door, and went for a walk.

AS HE PASSED his neighbor still seated in her yard with her child, Barry nodded politely. She still had the big Mother Goose book open on her lap.

He walked along the sunny streets of the college town with wide strides. He liked to walk, found it good exercise to calm the nerves and steady the thoughts. He began to analyse his irritation.

Somehow that nursery rhyme had got beneath his skin. It had been coincidence of course, but still, it made you think, it did.

Barry had done some work in his own student years on Middle English literature and some of his research had crossed the Mother Goose lore. He knew that many of the apparently pointless verses had once had very definite meanings. Time had erased their references and what now remained were apparently silly jingles.

For instance there was the one about Little Jack Horner, which referred to an actual personage of that name. This person, some sort of minor official in England five hundred years ago, had won himself a "plum" in the royal Christmas honors for doing some sort of secret toadying never made public. The verse had been made up in mockery by his enemies and popularized around the taverns.

Perhaps more obvious was the one about "Hark, hark, the

dogs do bark," and the beggars who came to town, having some among them in *silken gowns*. This was essentially the same deal — nobility coming to beg favors of the king at Christmastime. The people in inns and marketplaces had a way of disguising their digs at their social betters in such a fashion as to avoid *lese majeste*.

And of course the one about Banbury Cross which referred to Lady Godiva's ride.

Barry remembered his amazement at the grim story behind what had seemed one of the silliest — that about Goosey, Goosey Gander and the old man who "would not say his prayers". This was a memorial of murder most black on a day of great evil. Yet, *How many miles to Babylon...*

He walked steadily through the streets, thinking about it. He worked the rhyme over, tore it apart, but still he could not fathom its possible original meaning. Finally he turned back and strode home. Once returned, he felt refreshed from the air and the exercise; he sat down again at his desk, renewed his attack on the little black urn.

He worked on it for the remainder of the afternoon, digging out his files, studying pictures of similar vessels and of Babylonian deities and demons. By nightfall he had to admit he'd not gotten near to solution. Nothing fitted the designs ex-

actly, although several seemed superficially close.

He went in to supper, found himself drifting back in thought to the urn and to the silly rhyme alternately. He was annoyed at his failure to get his mind off the side issue. He could ask some of the Lit. faculty about the verse, he thought. Probably they could tell him its origin and meaning in a minute. But not tonight.

After eating, he read the evening paper, turned on the television, watched a comedian for an hour, found him neither funny nor relaxing, turned off the machine, decided to go to bed. He was still oddly irritated, still keyed up by the obstacle to his intellect. After all, with Babylon only threescore miles and ten away . . . "by candlelight" that is, his mind corrected himself as he entered the bedroom.

What silly thoughts! Maybe by morning he'd get that jingle out of his head and be able to look at the relic in a less clouded light. He undid his tie, hesitated. "Maybe I'd better have another glance at that thing," he murmured to himself. He left the bedroom, passed through the dark hall, and entered his study.

He switched the desk light on and took the little urn in his hand, studying the figure. The man was indeed walking somewhere by candlelight. And his heels *were* nimble and light.

Yet even so, Barry's mind slipped in a new twist, what man could walk seventy miles in the time it would take a candle to burn down? Assuming even that it was a large candle, it would last at most four or five hours. That meant walking at least fifteen miles an hour. He had heard somewhere that a man could run at that rate for perhaps a few seconds, but certainly not for hours.

And then of course it wasn't really seventy miles — it was twice that, because you have to get back again, too. And by the same candlelight incidentally.

That definitely put it out of possible class.

Another idea struck Barry. Maybe if he put a candle into the black stone relic and lit it, perhaps it would put some sort of special angle on the engravings and bring out some unnoticed secret details. He'd heard of such things in Egyptian statuary. Anyway, it would be an amusing experiment.

He looked around. There was a candle sticking in an ornamental silver holder on the mantel in the study. He took it down, tried the candle into the hollowed space and found it just fit, tight and neat.

He reached into his pocket for his lighter, flicked it, and lit the candle. Then, to complete the effect, he switched off the desk light.

The candlelight flickered in

the room, throwing moving shadows all about. Barry stared at the black urn but it was in darkness from the glow above.

"How many miles to Babylon?" he said under his breath. And quick as a flash his mind answered:

"Three score miles and ten."

Why, of course, he thought, *of course!* It should have been *obvious*, but he asked aloud: "Can I get there by candle-light?"

*Yes, and back again.* It was so certain that he arose from his seat, holding the candle in its black Babylonian container, and, shielding it with his other hand from drafts, strode confidently to the door, out the hall, opened the front door, and walked out into the street.

IT WAS ALL so incredibly clear now. You could go anywhere you wished if you just saw it the right way. Why, he marveled, there are two ways of getting anywhere — the difficult, ordinary way everyone stuck to — and the *obvious* way.

"If your heels are nimble and light," he said happily to himself, and increased his pace springily. "My heels are nimble and light — I'm a naturally fast walker," he laughingly told himself. His body was tingling with excitement, his mind seemed clearer than ever before. Why hadn't he ever seen how simple it was, how fast one could go

places this way, this simple clear *shortcut* way!

"You may get there by candle-light," he laughed aloud, holding the candle high before him, shielding it with outstretched hand and pacing breathlessly through the night. The flickering yellow flame cast little light about. He could see almost nothing in the blackness about him. Somehow he didn't expect to. Not by the shortcut; you won't get scenery. The idea is to get there and I shall. Only seventy miles, Barry thought, and I must be eating that up fast. I'll get there before this candle is half gone.

He walked faster, the light flickering before him, the opaque dark all about. Beneath his feet was the crunch of dirt and then the swishing resiliency of sand.

Suddenly before him loomed a wall. He stopped, almost bumping into it. His breath was fast; he had been walking hard, but he was in perfect spirits. It was a bit cold out here, he thought, not as warm as it should be.

But it gets cold quickly on the desert, he thought. He held the candle up. The wall was old, it was sandswept and timeworn. It was ancient, and it was — he saw from the faint traceries of weather-worn carvings — Babylonian. He looked up feeling suddenly faint and uneasy.

There were stars above him

and in their pale glow he saw that he was standing out on a desert, in the midst of a barren desert, broken here and there by bits of projecting stone, partial walls broken by time, bits of excavated basements. A thin cold wind was blowing from somewhere and there was nothing living in sight.

The candle flickered in his hand. His hand suddenly shook as with the ague, as with terror. He stared about. The candle flickered again. Something, something was breathing on it, breathing over his shoulder from behind him.

If the candle went out, he'd never get back. And as the thought struck him, at that very moment the candle — only half burned — flickered again. A

nauseating breath blew past his shoulder and the candle went out.

In a split second Barry Kane remembered the other half of the engraving on the black urn, the half turned away from the walking god with the nimble heels and the light, the thing towards which his nimble steps were surely directed. He turned his head quickly, looked over his shoulder.

Now he knew that there was another significance to the injunction, *if your heels are nimble and light*. It didn't just apply to the getting there; it also meant getting back. And he'd dallied too long in Babylon.

For the ancient Babylonian sculptor had been a good artist. The engraving was true to life.

#### *A Note in regard to Babylon via the Mother Goose Line:*

*For the benefit of the curious who may read this tale, the actual origin and meaning of the nursery rhyme, "How Many Miles To Babylon?" is indeed veiled in obscurity. Most such Mother Goose rhymes have roots that can be identified, but from the beginning this one has puzzled and mystified those who have paid it more than*

*passing attention. There exist some older versions, one or two of which seem to hint at an Arthurian connection, implying that the "Babylon" was originally meant to be "Camelot". In another ancient version, the mileage is given as "eight and eight and eight", but in most versions the mileage is the same — seventy — and the verse is*

*very nearly unchanged.*

*One theory advanced is that the word "Babylon" is a corruption of "Babyland" and the whole verse therefore an allegory of life . . . the "threescore and ten" being readily identified as the allotted life span of mortal man given by the Bible, and the meaning of the verse a commentary on the shortness of life,*

*which is but a "candlelight" from Baby-land to the infantile senility which precedes death.*

*However, this is merely a professional theory, with not a scrap of recorded folklore to sustain it. Meanwhile, my own rendition is much more exactly literal; therefore, perhaps it will do. DAW*

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The cryptic reference to the ghastly story behind the jingle "Goosey, Goosey Gander" led us to put the thumbscrews on author Wollheim, as we had never heard about this aspect of the famous rhyme before. The "lady's chamber" in the jingle refers to the queen's chamber, whence an "old man" was dragged by fanatics during the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's day to be slaughtered and thrown down the stairs because he "would not say his prayers". Whether he was the queen's lover, or a particular Huguenot friend her majesty wanted spared, deponent sayeth not.

Donald A. Wollheim is author of a recent biography of Lee DeForest, inventor of the vacuum tube, and of the current series of science-based books, for young people, "Mike Mars".

You'll see him we trust, in the next issue with a quiet little tale which nonetheless may leave a shudder. Don't miss "Doorslammer".

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# The Inexperienced Ghost

by H. G. Wells

*A master of imaginative fiction, with a solid orientation toward the scientific approach, Wells did, at times, touch upon the "supernatural" — but never in the traditional manner. By taking the fantastic or "supernatural" as something given, his manner was to explore the logical consequences, the logical effects upon human beings who were, in all other respects, reacting and behaving in their usual manner. It is this natural quality which produces in the reader the "suspension of disbelief" in the strange happenings. So this ghost you will encounter below is not quite like any other ghost that had appeared in fiction before . . .*

THE SCENE amidst which Clayton told his story comes back very vividly to my mind. There he sat, for the greater part of the time, in the corner of the authentic settle by the spacious open fire, and Sanderson sat beside him smoking the Broseley clay that bore his name. There was Evans, and that marvel among actors, Wish,

who is also a modest man. We had all come down to the Mermaid Club that Saturday morning, except Clayton, who had slept there overnight — which indeed gave him the opening of his story. We had golfed until golfing was invisible; we had dined, and we were in that mood of tranquil kindness when men will suffer a story.



When Clayton began to tell one, we naturally supposed he was lying. It may be that indeed he was lying — of that the reader will speedily be able to judge as well as I. He began, it is true, with an air of matter-of-fact anecdote, but that we thought was only the incurable artifice of the man.

"I say!" he remarked, after a long consideration of the upward rain of sparks from the log that Sanderson had thumped, "you know I was alone here last night?"

"Except for the domestics," said Wish.

"Who sleep in the other wing," said Clayton. "Yes. Well . . ." He pulled at his cigar for some little time as though he still hesitated about his confidence. Then he said, quite quietly, "I caught a ghost!"

"Caught a ghost, did you?" said Sanderson. "Where is it?"

And Evans, who admires Clayton immensely and has been four weeks in America, shouted, "Caught a ghost, did you, Clayton? I'm glad of it! Tell us all about it right now." Clayton said he would in a minute, and asked him to shut the door.

He looked apologetically at me. "There's no eavesdropping of course, but we don't want to upset our very excellent service with any rumours of ghosts in the place. There's too much shadow and oak panelling to

trifle with that. And this, you know, wasn't a regular ghost. I don't think it will come again — ever."

"You mean to say you didn't keep it?" said Sanderson.

"I hadn't the heart to," said Clayton.

And Sanderson said he was surprised.

We laughed, and Clayton looked aggrieved. "I know," he said, with the flicker of a smile, "but the fact is it really *was* a ghost, and I'm as sure of it as I am that I am talking to you now. I'm not joking. I mean what I say."

Sanderson drew deeply at his pipe, with one reddish eye on Clayton, and then emitted a thin jet of smoke more eloquent than many words.

Clayton ignored the comment. "It is the strangest thing that has ever happened in my life. You know I never believed in ghosts or anything of the sort, before, ever. And then, you know, I bag one in a corner — and the whole business is in my hands."

He meditated still more profoundly, and produced and began to pierce a second cigar with a curious little stabber he affected.

"You talked to it?" asked Wish.

"For the space, probably, of an hour."

"Chatty?" I said, joining the party of the sceptics.

"The poor devil was in trouble," said Clayton, bowed over his cigar-end and with the very faintest note of reproof.

"Sobbing?" some one asked.

Clayton heaved a realistic sigh at the memory. "Good Lord!" he said. "Yes." And then, "Poor fellow! yes."

"Where did you strike it?" asked Evans, in his best American accent.

"I never realized," said Clayton, ignoring him, "the poor sort of thing a ghost might be," and he hung us up again for a time, while he sought for matches in his pocket and lit and warmed to his cigar.

"I took an advantage," he reflected at last.

WE WERE NONE OF us in a hurry. "A character," he said, "remains just the same character for all that it's been disembodied. That's a thing we too often forget. People with a certain strength or fixity of purpose — most haunting ghosts, you know, must be as one-idea'd as monomaniacs and as obstinate as mules to come back again and again. This poor creature wasn't." He suddenly looked up rather queerly, and his eye went round the room. "I say it," he said, "in all kindness, but that is the plain truth of the case. Even at the first glance he struck me as weak."

He punctuated with the help of his cigar.

"I came upon him, you know, in the long passage. His back was towards me and I saw him first. Right off I knew him for a ghost. He was transparent and whitish. Clean through his chest I could see the glimmer of the little window at the end. And not only his physique but his attitude struck me as being weak. He looked, you know, as though he didn't know in the slightest whatever he meant to do. One hand was on the panelling and the other fluttered to his mouth. Like — *so!*"

"What sort of physique?" said Sanderson.

"Lean. You know that sort of young man's neck that has two great flutings down the back, here and here — *so!* And a little, meanish head with scrubby hair and rather bad ears. Shoulders bad, narrower than the hips. Turndown collar, ready-made short jacket, trousers baggy and a little frayed at the heels. That's how he took me. I came very quietly up the staircase. I did not carry a light, you know — the candles are on the landing table and there is that lamp — and I was in my slippers, and I saw him as I came up. I stopped dead at that — taking him in. I wasn't a bit afraid or excited as one imagines one would be. I was surprised and interested. I thought, 'Good Lord! Here's a ghost at

last! And I haven't believed for a moment in ghosts during the last five-and-twenty years."

"Um," said Wish.

"I suppose I wasn't on the landing a moment before he found out I was there. He turned on me sharply, and I saw the face of an immature young man, a weak nose, a scrubby little moustache, a feeble chin. So for an instant we stood — he looking over his shoulder at me — and regarded one another. Then he seemed to remember his high calling. He turned round, drew himself up, projected his face, raised his arms, spread his hands in approved ghost fashion — came towards me. As he did so his little jaw dropped, and he emitted a faint, drawn-out 'Boo.'

"No, it wasn't — not a bit dreadful. I'd dined. I'd had a bottle of champagne, and being all alone, perhaps two or three — perhaps even four or five — whiskies, so I was as solid as rocks and no more frightened than if I'd been assailed by a frog. 'Boo!' I said. 'Nonsense. You don't belong to *this* place. What are you doing here?'

"I could see him wince. 'Boo-oo,' he said.

"'Boo — be hanged! Are you a member?' I said; and just to show I didn't care a pin for him I stepped through a corner of him and made to light my candle. 'Are you a member?' I repeated, looking at him sideways.

"He moved a little so as to stand clear of me, and his bearing became crestfallen. 'No,' he said, in answer to the persistent interrogation of my eye. 'I'm not a member — I'm a ghost.'

"'Well, that doesn't give you the run of the Mermaid Club. Is there any one you want to see, or anything of that sort?' and doing it as steadily as possible for fear that he should mistake the carelessness of whisky for the distraction of fear, I got my candle alight. I turned on him, holding it. 'What are you doing here?' I said.

"He had dropped his hands and stopped his booing, and there he stood, abashed and awkward, the ghost of a weak, silly, aimless young man. 'I'm haunting,' he said.

"'You haven't any business to,' I said in a quiet voice.

"'I'm a ghost,' he said, as if in defence.

"'That may be, but you haven't any business to haunt here. This is a respectable private club. People often stop here with nursemaids and children, and, going about in the careless way you do, some poor little mite could easily come upon you and be scared out of her wits. I suppose you didn't think of that?'

"'No sir,' he said, 'I didn't.'

"'You should have done. You haven't any claim on the place have you? Weren't murdered here, or anything of that sort?'

"None, sir. But I thought as it was old and oak-panelled . . ."

"That's *no* excuse,' I regarded him firmly. 'Your coming here is a mistake,' I said, in a tone of friendly superiority. I feigned to see if I had my matches, and then looked up at him frankly. 'If I were you I wouldn't wait for cock-crow — I'd vanish right away.'

"He looked embarrassed. 'The fact is, sir . . .' he began.

"'I'd vanish,' I said, driving it home.

"'The fact is, sir, that — somehow — I can't.'

"'You *can't*'"

"'No, sir. There's something I've forgotten. I've been hanging about here since midnight last night, hiding in the cupboards of the empty bedrooms and things like that. I'm flurried. I've never come haunting before, and it seems to put me out.'

"'Put you out?'

"'Yes, sir. I've tried to do it several times, and it doesn't come off. There's some little thing has slipped me, and I can't get back.'

"THAT, YOU KNOW, rather bowled me over. He looked at me in such an abject way that for the life of me I couldn't keep up quite the high, hectoring vein I had adopted. 'That's queer,' I said, and as I spoke I fancied I heard some one moving about down below. 'Come into my room and tell me more

about it,' I said. 'I don't, of course, understand this,' and I tried to take him by the arm. But, of course, you might as well have tried to take hold of a puff of smoke!

"I had forgotten my number, I think; anyhow, I remember going into several bedrooms — it was lucky I was the only soul in that wing — until I saw my traps. 'Here we are,' I said, and sat down in the arm-chair. 'Sit down and tell me all about it. It seems to me you have got yourself into a jolly awkward position, old chap.'

"Well, he said he wouldn't sit down! he'd prefer to flit up and down the room if it was all the same to me. And so he did, and in a little while we were deep in a long and serious talk. And presently, you know, something of those whiskies and sodas evaporated out of me, and I began to realize just a little what a thundering rum and weird business it was that I was in. There he was, semi-transparent — the proper conventional phantom, and noiseless except for his ghost of a voice — flitting to and fro in that nice, clean, chintz-hung old bedroom. You could see the gleam of the copper candlesticks through him, and the lights on the brass fender, and the corners of the framed engravings on the wall, and there he was telling me all about this wretched little life of his that had recently ended on

Earth. He hadn't a particularly honest face, you know, but being transparent, of course, he couldn't avoid telling the truth."

"Eh?" said Wish, suddenly sitting up in his chair.

"What?" said Clayton.

"Being transparent — couldn't avoid telling the truth — I don't see it," said Wish.

"I don't see it," said Clayton, with inimitable assurance. "But it is so, I can assure you nevertheless. I don't believe he got once a nail's breadth off the Bible truth. He told me how he had been killed — he went down into a London basement with a candle to look for a leakage of gas — and described himself as a senior English master in a London private school when that release occurred."

"Poor wretch!" said I.

"That's what I thought, and the more he talked the more I thought it. There he was, purposeless in life and purposeless out of it. He talked of his father and mother and his schoolmaster, and all who had ever been anything to him in the world, meanly. He had been too sensitive, too nervous. None of them had ever valued him properly or understood him, he said. He had never had a real friend in the world, I think. He had never had a success. He had shirked games and failed examinations. 'It's like that with some people,' he said. 'Whenever I got into the examination-room

or anywhere everything seemed to go.' Engaged to be married of course — to another over-sensitive person, I suppose — when the indiscretion with the gas escape ended his affairs. 'And where are you now?' I asked. 'Not in . . .?'

"He wasn't clear on that point at all. The impression he gave me was of a sort of vague, intermediate state, a special reserve for souls too non-existent for anything so positive as either sin or virtue. I don't know. He was much too egotistical and unobservant to give me any clear idea of the kind of place, kind of country, there is on the Other Side of Things. Wherever he was, he seems to have fallen in with a set of kindred spirits: ghosts of weak Cockney young men, who were on a footing of Christian names, and among these there was certainly a lot of talk about 'going haunting' and things like that. Yes — going haunting! They seemed to think 'haunting' a tremendous adventure, and most of them funk'd it all the time. And so primed, you know, he had come."

"But really!" said Wish to the fire.

"These are the impressions he gave me, anyhow," said Clayton, modestly. "I may, of course, have been in a rather uncritical state, but that was the sort of background he gave to himself. He kept flitting up and down,

with his thin voice going — talking, talking about his wretched self, and never a word of clear, firm statement from first to last. He was thinner and sillier and more pointless than if he had been real and alive. Only then, you know, he would not have been in my bedroom here — if he had been alive. I should have kicked him out.”

“Of course,” said Evans, “there *are* poor mortals like that.”

“And there’s just as much chance of their having ghosts as the rest of us,” I admitted.

“WHAT GAVE A SORT of point to him, you know, was the fact that he did seem within limits to have found himself out. The mess he had made of haunting had depressed him terribly. He had been told it would be a ‘lark’. He had come expecting it to be a ‘lark,’ and here it was, nothing but another failure added to his record! He proclaimed himself an utter out-and-out failure. He said, and I can quite believe it, that he had never tried to do anything all his life that he hadn’t made a perfect mess of — and through all the wastes of eternity he never would. If he had had sympathy, perhaps . . .

“He paused at that, and stood regarding me. He remarked that, strange as it might seem to me, nobody, not any one, ever, had given him the amount of sympa-

thy I was doing now. I could see what he wanted straight away, and I determined to head him off at once. I may be a brute, you know, but being the Only Real Friend, the recipient of the confidences of one of these egotistical weaklings, ghost or body, is beyond my physical endurance. I got up briskly. ‘Don’t you brood on these things too much,’ I said. ‘The thing you’ve got to do is to get out of this — get out of this sharp. You pull yourself together and *try*.’ ‘I can’t,’ he said. ‘You try,’ I said, and try he did.”

“Try!” said Sanderson. “How?”

“Passes,” said Clayton.

“Passes?”

“Complicated series of gestures and passes with the hands. That’s how he had come in and that’s how he had to get out again. Lord! what a business I had!”

“But how could *any* series of passes . . .” I began.

“My dear man,” said Clayton, turning on me and putting a great emphasis on certain words, “you want *everything* clear. I don’t know *how*. All I know is that you *do* — that *he* did, anyhow, at least. After a fearful time, you know, he got his passes right and suddenly disappeared.”

“Did you,” said Sanderson, slowly, “observe the passes?”

“Yes,” said Clayton, and seemed to think. “It was tre-

mendously queer," he said. "There we were, I and this thin vague ghost, in that silent room, in this silent, empty inn, in this silent little Friday-night town. Not a sound except our voices and a faint panting he made when he swung. There was the bedroom candle, and one candle on the dressing-table alight, that was all — sometimes one or other would flare up into a tall, lean, astonished flame for a space. And queer things happened. 'I can't,' he said. 'I shall never . . . !' And suddenly he sat down on a little chair at the foot of the bed and began to sob and sob. Lord! what a harrowing, whimpering thing he seemed!

"'You pull yourself together,' I said, and tried to pat him on the back, and . . . my confounded hand went through him! By that time, you know, I wasn't nearly so — massive as I had been on the landing. I got the queerness of it full. I remember snatching back my hand out of him, as it were, with a little thrill, and walking over to the dressing-table. 'You pull yourself together,' I said to him, 'and try.' And in order to encourage and help him I began to try as well."

"What!" said Sanderson, "the passes?"

"Yes, the passes."

"But . . ." I said, moved by an idea that eluded me for a space.

"This is interesting," said Sanderson, with his pipe-bowl. "You mean to say this ghost of yours gave away . . ."

"Did his level best to give away the whole confounded barrier? Yes."

"He didn't, said Wish. 'He couldn't. Or you'd have gone there too.'"

"That's precisely it," I said, finding my elusive idea put into words for me.

"That *is* precisely it," said Clayton, with thoughtful eyes upon the fire.

For just a little while there was silence.

"And at last he did it?" said Sanderson.

"At last he did it. I had to keep him up to it hard, but he did it at last — rather suddenly. He despaired, we had a scene, and then he got up abruptly and asked me to go through the whole performance, slowly, so that he might see. 'I believe,' he said, 'if I could *see* I should spot what was wrong at once.' And he did. 'I know,' he said. 'What do you know?' said I. 'I know,' he repeated. Then he said, peevishly, 'I *can't* do it if you look at me — I really *can't*. It's been that, partly, all along. I'm such a nervous fellow that you put me out.'

"Well, we had a bit of an argument. Naturally I wanted to see, but he was as obstinate as a mule, and suddenly I had come over as tired as a dog —

he tired me out. 'All right, I said, 'I won't look at you,' and turned towards the mirror, on the wardrobe, by the bed.

"He started off very fast. I tried to follow him by looking in the looking-glass, to see just what it was had hung. Round went his arms and his hands, so, and so, and so, and then with a rush came to the last gesture of all — you stand erect and open out your arms — and so, don't you know, he stood. And then he didn't! He didn't! He wasn't! I wheeled round from the looking-glass to him. There was nothing! I was alone, with the flaring candles and a staggering mind. What had happened? Had anything happened? Had I been dreaming? . . . And then, with an absurd note of finality about it, the clock upon the landing discovered the moment was ripe for striking *one*. Sol — Ping! And I was as grave and sober as a judge, with all my champagne and whisky gone into the vast serene. Feeling queer, you know — confoundedly *queer*! Queer! Good Lord!"

He regarded his cigar-ash for a moment. "That's all that happened," he said.

"And then you went to bed?" asked Evans.

"What else was there to do?"

I LOOKED WISH in the eye. We wanted to scoff, and there was something, something perhaps in Clayton's voice and

manner, that hampered our desire.

"And about these passes?" said Sanderson.

"I believe I could do them now.

"Oh!" said Sanderson, and produced a penknife and set himself to grub the dottel out of the bowl of his clay.

"Why don't you do them now?" said Sanderson, shutting his pen-knife with a click.

"That's what I'm going to do," said Clayton.

"They won't work," said Evans.

"If they do . . ." I suggested.

"You know, I'd rather you didn't," said Wish, stretching out his legs.

"Why?" asked Evans.

"I'd rather he didn't," said Wish.

"But he hasn't got 'em right," said Sanderson, plugging too much tobacco in his pipe.

"All the same, I'd rather he didn't," said Wish.

We argued with Wish. He said that for Clayton to go through those gestures was like mocking a serious matter. "But you don't believe . . .?" I said. Wish glanced at Clayton, who was staring into the fire, weighing something in his mind. "I do — more than half, anyhow, I do," said Wish.

"Clayton," said I, "you're too good a liar for us. Most of it was all right. But that disappearance . . . happened to be



convincing. Tell us, it's a tale of cock and bull."

He stood up without heeding me, took the middle of the hearthrug, and faced me. For a moment he regarded his feet thoughtfully, and then for all the rest of the time his eyes were on the opposite wall, with an intent expression. He raised his two hands slowly to the level of his eyes and so began . . .

Now, Sanderson is a Freemason, a member of the lodge of the Four Kings, which devotes itself so ably to the study and elucidation of all the mysteries of Masonry past and present, and among the students of this lodge Sanderson is by no means the least. He followed Clayton's motions with a singular interest in his reddish eye. "That's not bad," he said, when it was done. "You really do, you know, put things together, Clayton, in a most amazing fashion. But there's one little detail out."

"I know," said Clayton. "I believe I could tell you which."

"Well?"

"This," said Clayton, and did a queer little twist and writhing and thrust of the hands.

"Yes."

"That, you know, was what *he* couldn't get right," said Clayton. "But how do *you* . . .?"

"Most of this business, and particularly how you invented it, I don't understand at all," said Sanderson, "but just that phase — I do." He reflected.

"These happen to be a series of gestures — connected with a certain branch of esoteric Masonry . . . Probably you know. Or else . . . *How?*" He reflected still further. "I do not see I can do any harm in telling you just the proper twist. After all, if you know, you know. If you don't, you don't."

"I know nothing," said Clayton, "except what the poor devil let out last night."

"Well, anyhow," said Sanderson, and placed his churchwarden very carefully upon the shelf over the fireplace. Then very rapidly he gesticulated with his hands.

"So?" said Clayton, repeating.

"So," said Sanderson, and took his pipe in hand again.

"Ah, *now*," said Clayton, "I can do the whole thing — right."

He stood up before the waning fire and smiled at us all. But I think there was just a little hesitation in his smile. "If I begin . . ." he said.

"I wouldn't begin," said Wish.

"It's all right!" said Evans.

"Matter is indestructible. You don't think any jiggery-pokery of this sort is going to snatch Clayton into the world of shades. Not it! You may try, Clayton, so far as I'm concerned, until your arms drop off at the wrists."

"I don't believe that," said Wish, and stood up and put his arm on Clayton's shoulder. "You've made me half believe

in that story somehow, and I don't want to see the thing done!"

"Goodness!" said I, "here's Wish frightened!"

"I am," said Wish, with real or admirably feigned intensity. "I believe that if he goes through these motions right he'll go."

"He'll not do anything of the sort," I cried. "There's only one way out of this world for men, and Clayton is thirty years from that. Besides . . . And such a ghost! Do you think . . .?"

Wish interrupted me by moving. He walked out from among our chairs and stopped beside the table and stood there. "Clayton," he said, "you're a fool."

CLAYTON, WITH A humorous light in his eyes, smiled back at him. "Wish," he said, "is right and all you others are wrong. I shall go. I shall get to the end of these passes, and as the last swish whistles through the air, Presto! — this hearthrug will be vacant, the room will be blank amazement, and a respectably dressed gentleman of fifteen stone will plump into the world of shades. I'm certain. So will you be. I decline to argue further. Let the thing be tried."

"No," said Wish, and made a step and ceased, and Clayton raised his hands once more to repeat the spirit's passing.

By that time, you know, we were all in a state of tension —

largely because of the behavior of Wish. We sat all of us with our eyes on Clayton — I, at least, with a sort of tight, stiff feeling about me as though from the back of my skull to the middle of my thighs my body had been changed to steel. And there, with a gravity that was imperceptibly serene, Clayton bowed and swayed and waved his hands and arms before us. As he drew towards the end one piled up, one tingled in one's teeth. The last gesture, I have said, was to swing the arms out wide open, with the face held up. And when at last he swung out to this closing gesture I ceased even to breathe. It was ridiculous, of course, but you know that ghost-story feeling. It was after dinner, in a queer, old shadowy house. Would he, after all . . .?

There he stood for one stupendous moment, with his arms open and his upturned face, assured and bright, in the glare of the hanging lamp. We hung through that moment as if it were an age, and then came from all of us something that was half a sigh of infinite relief and half a reassuring "No!" For visibly — he wasn't going. It was all nonsense. He had told an idle story, and carried it almost to conviction, that was all! . . . And then in that moment the face of Clayton changed.

It changed. It changed as a lit house changes when its lights

are suddenly extinguished. His eyes were suddenly eyes that were fixed, his smile was frozen on his lips, and he stood there still. He stood there, very gently swaying.

That moment, too, was an age. And then, you know, chairs were scraping, things were falling, and we were all moving. His knees seemed to give, and he fell forward, and Evans rose and caught him in his arms . . .

It stunned us all. For a minute I suppose no one said a coherent thing. We believed it, yet could not believe it . . . I came out of a muddled stupefaction to find myself kneeling beside him, and his vest and shirt were torn open, and Sanderson's hand lay on his heart . . .

Well — the simple fact before us could very well wait our convenience; there was no hurry

for us to comprehend. It lay there for an hour; it lies athwart my memory, black and amazing still, to this day. Clayton had, indeed, passed into the world that lies so near to and so far from our own, and he had gone thither by the only road that mortal man may take. But whether he did indeed pass there by that poor ghost's incantation, or whether he was stricken suddenly by apoplexy in the midst of an idle tale — as the coroner's jury would have us believe — is no matter for my judging; it is just one of those inexplicable riddles that must remain unsolved until the final solution of all things shall come. All I certainly know is that, in the very moment, in the very instant, of concluding those passes, he changed, and staggered, and fell down before us — dead!



# The Unbeliever

by Robert Silverberg

*Back in the middle Fifties, when your editor was at the helm of several science fiction magazines, and other types, he was visited one day by two young science-fictioneers — one an author who had appeared a few times, the other a leading “fan”, who had appeared only in fan magazines — who announced beamishly that they had formed a collaborating team, and were about to make millions writing science fiction. To put it mildly we were skeptical. To put it still more mildly, we were wrong — so far as one half of that team is concerned. The published works of Robert Silverberg, of which no end is yet in sight, overflowed the traditional five foot shelf several years ago, and if he has not literally made millions, the exaggeration is not a great one. The theme here present is a favorite one with writers of fiction, but one which never quite grows stale, for the variations are endless, as are the variations in specific human behavior — without which there would be no fiction worth reading. While The Devil and his adventures and misadventures with corrupt humans requires some traditional assumptions, the author here presents one basic premise all his own, and a revelation you will not have encountered before.*

“HE DOESN’T believe in me,” His Eminence said.

“It must be very frustrating,” I agreed. I know how he covets the kind of soul that resists.

“Mephisto, you have no idea. Steiner’s committed enough sins

to put him away for two eternities, but I don’t have any legal hold on him. Oh, if I could get him down here.”

“You don’t stand much chance, Your Eminence,” said Beelzebub, entering the throne-

room suddenly. "At last word he's completely unshakable in his determination not to believe in you. In fact, he's so sure that there are no powers of evil that he's organized a Thirteen Club which specializes in defying superstitions."

I could see that made Satan angry. "I'm going to get that man. No mortal has ever given me so much trouble before, and I'll fix him for it."

"Bet you don't get him," Beelzebub said. I've always envied him for the casual way in which he talks to His Eminence.

"You don't think so, eh?"

I wanted to suggest Faust, but a few millenia on this job have taught me caution. Anyway, I knew the job was going to fall on me — I always get stuck with the dirty work — and I stood there in waiting.

His Eminence smiled. "Mephisto, my lad — you've always been my favorite. I've always saved you for the choicest jobs."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"I want you to get me Steiner. I don't care how you do it, but I want you to make that man believe in me. And as soon as he admits his belief, we've got him. Go, quickly — and don't come back till you've got him."

I didn't like the tone of his voice, and I was pretty glad I hadn't mentioned the Faust episode after all. I backed away, not liking the malicious smile on Beelzebub's face, and head-

ed for Earth by the shortest route. I would have to hurry; if anything should happen to Steiner before I got to him, we'd lose him. He wouldn't exactly go to The Enemy, but we wouldn't get him either.

Finding Steiner was fairly easy. I tracked him to the city he lived in — New York and I were old friends — and stopped off at his bank in the guise of a poor laborer looking for a loan. I didn't get far enough to see Steiner; some third assistant clerk refused my request. Then I took the form of a disgruntled depositor wanting to make a complaint, and they neatly shunted me out a side exit after a short chat with the Assistant Manager. Finally I reappeared as Steiner's wife, and then I had no trouble. They conducted me to his office with greasy courtesy, and there his pretty young secretary — his dossier told me what he'd been up to with *her* — told me that he'd gone home to prepare for a club meeting.

I couldn't stand wearing that woman's body much longer, so I dissolved it as soon as I got outside the bank and headed for Steiner's home.

I came through the door and noted a rack from which hung thirteen open umbrellas. The meeting was under way, then. I floated into the main room.

There were thirteen of them: a college kid with a crewcut; a

sturdy white-haired old man also wearing a crewcut; two writers (both scheduled for us, I know); a gaunt, sixty-ish spinster; and a group of thoroughly commonplace middle-aged men. I spotted Steiner quickly — he was plump, cheerful-looking, smooth-faced, middle-aged, comfortable. I extended a tentative exploring thought toward him and found a solid wall of skepticism. This was going to be rough, but I had a plan.

I let my mind roam through those of the assembled thirteen. The college kid showed the most surface bravado, but underneath it he was plenty worried. As for the others, a little undercurrent of fear brushed through their minds, and it was coupled, in the spinster's mind, with the hope that something exciting would happen.

I searched a little more diligently and found the weak spot I was looking for. He was a new member named Sam Arnold — a businessman friend of Steiner's — who had come to the meeting more out of curiosity than anything else. He would be easy to use: in his mind I found a very real fear of hell, and the mental picture he had of our domain was considerably more terrifying than the actuality. He was my man.

I sat down on the floor to watch the proceedings. My curiosity was aroused — say, my professional interest.

They were milling around, busily breaking superstitions as fast as they could think of them, in a selfconscious sort of way. The college kid came up to two of the businessmen and offered them cigarettes, and lit them — three on a match. They seemed to delight in defying the superstition, but I detected uneasiness underneath.

There was a black cat who wandered right through me as I sat on the floor. As the cat passed through me he arched his back. It's always amazed me how cats can detect our presence and most humans can't.

The gaunt woman kept trying to catch the cat and rub his fur the wrong way, but the cat was a clever one and kept eluding her.

I continued to rove through the minds of the gathering as all this was going on. Twelve minds were emanating subtle waves of fear and doubt, but one — Steiner's — was calm and unshakable in its belief that evil had no power over him.

At exactly 7:13 the dinner bell rang and the guests moved to the dining room, passing under a ladder which stood on the costly rug outside the dining-room door in order to enter. I decided to wait till the end of the meal before making my move.

There was a long table, with six seats on one side, five on the other, one at each end.

Steiner sat at one end of the table and put the newcomer Sam Arnold at the other. Fine; he was playing right into my hands.

They sat down, lifted their salt-shakers, and spilled salt. I picked up an underlying feeling of embarrassment from one well-bred member.

Then the waiters — crosseyed, of course — brought out little mirrors and distributed them. Steiner took his in his left hand and rapped it sharply with his knife, cracking it neatly. All followed suit.

Then they dug into the meal, and it must have been a good one, for they ate calmly, almost forgetting the nature of their gathering. That black cat kept wandering back and forth and picking up scraps Steiner dropped for him.

After the dessert Steiner stood up.

He spoke for a few moments on the growing spread of trisk-aidekaphoby — he meant “-phobia,” not “-phoby,” but no one corrected him — and hoped that the publicity which their club was getting would help to combat the spread of superstition. They applauded.

“Fellow superstition-haters,” he said, “this meeting has been a great success.” He consulted a card. “The next time we will be together will be on the next Friday the Thirteenth, which falls in May.”

I sensed that this was the

windup, and I went around behind Sam Arnold's chair. I detected a strong feeling of relief coming from Arnold; he was glad it was all over and that he had survived it. He was a coward; it sickened me, and I was glad I'd picked him.

Steiner began to recite as I readied myself. I wasn't paying close attention, but I caught some of it.

*“Thy be hallowed.”* Steiner finished, *“Heaven in art which father our.”* Then he sat down, amid much approving laughter.

I materialized in the silly, traditional form.

I CAME IN a thunderclap, using the sound effects of the groaning of the damned, and lifted that miserable little Sam Arnold out of his chair before he knew what was going on. I carried him off in a hurry, not forgetting to leave a trail of sulphur behind me, and, since his time had not yet come, I deposited him at the edge of the city. Then I returned.

The assembled members of the Thirteen Club were in a little huddled heap, recovering. All the superstitions they had so nicely repressed had flooded to the front of their minds, and they were a dazed lot.

The college student was kneeling near the door, examining in a shocked way the rug, where the prints of my cloven hooves had been burned into the nap.

The others crouched behind the table, in terror.

Slowly the shock wore off and they became able to move. They left in a hurry, looking warily at the footprints in the rug and at the scorched walls. They were absolutely silent, and I examined their minds and found abject, groveling fear. None of them would ever go under a ladder again, or even near one.

Which, I suppose, was a logical reaction. I waited till they were all gone and then turned to Steiner.

He was sitting calmly at the head of the table, watching them go. The Thirteen Club had been dissolved in a hurry, and had just one member left. The others all disappeared through the door and doubtlessly were dashing madly down the streets away from the house. He spat out one word.

"Cowards!"

I probed him. He meant it.

That man was still firm in his belief that evil had no power over him.

I thought of his dossier — one forgery, ten blackmailings, eleven seductions, a whole host of minor sins, and the determination not to let anything change him; he was ticketed for us, all right. But he held tightly to his skepticism; there was no room for us in his mind.

I materialized again.

"You see the power of Hell?" I asked.

"Nonsense," Steiner said. "Hell is a mere superstition inherited from the primitive Norse, and you're a hallucination."

I frowned. This was not the reaction I wanted.

"You still don't fear us, Steiner? You've sinned grievously, you know. You've been a law unto yourself for fifty years, and now your punishment awaits you."

"There's no punishment awaiting me," Steiner said. "If you want, punish those poor sheep who ran away. That's where your power lies. I won't be frightened. You can't touch me."

His Eminence wasn't going to like this. He didn't want me back without Steiner's soul, and it didn't look as if I was going to get it. But I had more than one trick in my bag.

I summoned lightning and it struck Steiner's house three times. Flames began to lick through the structure, and I helped them along. Steiner sat with his hands folded at the long table, paying no attention as the flames grew closer and closer.

Finally I had to drag him out into the street, since I couldn't let his body be destroyed while he still refused to believe in us.

He was the most steadfast skeptic I've ever seen. There's



not one who won't break down sooner or later — the most convinced atheist will eventually succumb to our propaganda. But not Steiner.

He stood in the street and watched his house burn down, and I looked in his mind and saw he believed it was still all hallucination. I flashed a thought down to His Eminence.

"He won't give in," I said. "I've done all I can, and he still won't believe in you. He thinks I'm a hallucination. He thinks all this is a joke."

"I want that soul," Satan said. "Do your best, and then do better than that."

We don't argue with His Eminence. I longed to look deep into Steiner, behind the skepticism of his conscious mind, and see what it was that really motivated him. But that tends to damage the soul, and His Eminence disapproves of receiving such damaged goods.

I went through a repertoire of pyrotechnics, flashing lightning, darkening the sky, appearing in my most terrifying incarnations. Steiner remained adamant and just a little bored. There could be all sorts of hallucinations.

I was nearing the end of my rope. About all I could do now was show him Hell. So I reached into Sam Arnold's mind for his conception of Hell — it was so terrifying that it even frightened me a little — and

brought it into existence right there in the street. It was a first-rate illusion.

Steiner stood right on the brink of the abyss, looking straight down at the plight of the damned and at His Eminence sitting on his throne, the bestial embodiment of evil. I saw a rather unflattering representation of myself at Satan's right hand, and Beelzebub on the left.

Cries of pain rose from the roasted and simmered until they were blacked husks and then were restored and roasted all over again. Steiner watched amusedly.

"You can't seriously think this disturbs *me*, do you?"

I wondered what was behind Steiner. We once had a case of an arch-sinner who believed, for a while, that he was Satan himself; but that notion collapsed when he was confronted with the real thing.

Did Steiner think so? I wondered.

I went around behind Steiner and tried to push him into the Pit. That usually arouses some terror; but not in him. He let me push him, and he went forward and stood in the air over the abyss, firm in the belief that he was still on the sidewalk.

Which he was.

I cursed. "Steiner, your soul is black," I said. "I'm here to get it. You're going to be burned."

"You have no hold on me."

It didn't matter what I did; he just charged it off as a hallucination.

I had just one weapon left.

I revealed Hell as it actually is.

He looked, and laughed.

For a moment I was unable to believe it. Total failure. I had been assigned the task of bringing this unbeliever to heel — and, unfortunately, we have no grasp over an utter and complete unbeliever.

In despair, I threw my mind at his, determined to probe the depths of that conscienceless brain, to wallow in its muck, looking for the weak spot in his armor that would enable me to deliver him to Satan.

And I was thrown back with a rude jolt. My mind was parried by the unexpected rebuff; it was like hitting a stone wall nose-first.

"No mortal could have done that," I said weakly.

"Poor demon," Steiner said. His voice was pitying. "What makes you think you can pull me off to your puny flames? You have no power over me, Mephisto."

Feebly I said, "No — it's impossible. You can't be from Above — not with all your sins. No one from Up There could carry on the way you have on Earth. Yet . . ."

"Yet I remain out of your jurisdiction." Steiner chuckled heavily, enjoying my discomfort. "Obviously I'm not mortal, else your mental thrust would have penetrated. And you're correct in your assumption that I'm not from On High. But why is your thinking so hopelessly black-and-white?"

He smiled scornfully. "Tell your master Satan that he's not the only Devil in the universe, and that he can expect equally discourteous treatment from my men if he ever chooses to spend his vacation on my home planet."

"Your home planet?" I repeated dizzily. "Does that mean . . ."

"You spoiled a nice restful vacation for me," Steiner said. "I won't forget that quickly."

"Who are you?" My voice was dry and strained.

Steiner smiled cheerfully. "I'm the Archfiend of Arcturus," he said, and vanished.



# Fidel Bassin

by W. J. Stamper

*After the assassination of Julius Caesar, in Shakespeare's play, a voice from the crowd expresses the fear that the now-dead dictator will be replaced by someone worse. We do not have to look very far to see examples of it in our own times, and certainly the motif runs through history. So this story of Haiti is by no means a relic of a forgotten past, nor is its horror something safely put behind us.*

"IT CANNOT BE done. It would be the most dastardly deed in the annals of Haiti. Send all prisoners to Port au Prince with the utmost celerity. The general orders. The general be damned!"

Thus spoke Captain Vilnord of the Haitian army as he finished reading the latest dispatch from headquarters. He was the most gentle and by far the most humane officer yet sent to Hinche to combat the ravages of the Cacos, the small banditry that continually terrorized the interior. Although he realized

that many a brave comrade had lost his head for words not half so strong as those he had just uttered, he did not care, for he had almost reached the breaking point. For months he had observed the cruelty with which the government at the capital dealt with the ignorant and half-clothed peasantry of the Department of the North. His nature revolted at the execution of the commands of General La Falais, the favorite general of the administration at Port au Prince. Hardly a day came but brought an order directing the imprison-

ment of some citizen, the ravage of some section with fire and sword, the wanton slaughtering of cattle or the burning of peaceful homes. He was a servant of the people and he had obeyed orders; but this last was too much.

"Any news of my captaincy?" inquired the rotund lieutenant, Fidel Bassin, as his chief finished the dispatch.

For answer Vilmord crumpled the message in his hand, threw it in the face of his subordinate and strode angrily out of the office. He went straight to the prison and entered without even returning the salute of the sentinel on duty.

He had viewed that noisome scene every day for weeks, powerless to aid or ameliorate the suffering. No food, no clothing, no medicine had arrived from Port au Prince, despite his urgent and repeated appeals. As he passed through the gloomy portal, a resolve was taking root in his bosom, and another sight of the victims would launch him upon the hazardous course he had seen opening for months.

The prison was a long, low adobe structure with three small grated windows but a foot from the roof. These furnished little ventilation, for the heat was stifling and the odors sickened him. Two hundred helpless men and women were crammed into this pesthouse of vermin and disease, and all under the pretext of

their being friendly to the Cacos. Old men lay writhing on the floor with dirty rags bound tightly about their shriveled black skulls, and as Vilmord passed they held up their skinny arms and pleaded for food. Withered old women sat hunched against the walls and rocked back and forth like maniacs. The younger men who yet had strength to stand, paced restlessly up and down with sullen and haggard faces. From every dusky corner shone eyes staring with horror. Ineffable despair overhung them all.

Vilmord stooped over an emaciated old man, who seemed striving to speak through his swollen lips, and asked, "What is it, papa?"

"It is the dread scourge, *Capitaine*," he rasped, "the black dysentery. I must have medicine or I go like my poor brother, Oreste."

He pointed to a mass of rags beside him.

Without fear of the disease whose odor pervaded the whole room, Vilmord gently lifted the remains of a filthy shirt under which Oreste had crept to die.

No man who has never looked upon a victim of tropical dysentery after life has fled can imagine the horror of the thing. The lips were so charred with the accompanying fever that they had turned inside out, and from the corners of the gaping mouth there oozed a thick and green-

ish fluid. The skin was drawn tightly over the bony cheeks, and the eyes had entirely disappeared, leaving but dark and ghastly holes. He had been dead for hours. With a scream like a wounded animal, Vilnord rushed from the charnel-house and to his office, where Fidel was still waiting.

He opened the drawer of his desk, pulled out a parchment neatly bound with ribbon, and to the amazement of his subordinate tore it in pieces. It was his commission in the army, just such a paper as Fidel had desired for many years.

"Fidel, I am through," he roared. "I will stand this wanton murder no longer. Do as you like about those orders, for you are in command. I leave for Pignon tonight to join Benoit, the Caco chief."

"But, *Capitaine*," remonstrated Fidel, "you must not do such a thing. La Falais will send all his regiments to seek you out. He will camp in Hinche for ten years or capture you."

"I defy La Falais and his murderers! Let him camp in Hinche for ten years. I will stay in the deep mountains of Baie Terrible for ten years. With Benoit I will fight to the death."

With these words Vilnord strode to the door, Krag-Jorgensen in hand, and mounted his waiting horse.

Fidel followed him out, and as he was adjusting his saddle

bags, inquired, "Would La Falais promote me if I failed to carry out those orders? Would he not stand me up before a firing squad?"

"You may pursue the same course which I have chosen, the only honorable course," answered Vilnord.

"But I am due for promotion."

Vilnord tore the captain's insignia from his collar and hurled them into the dust.

"You will never be a captain. *Au revoir*," he cried back to Fidel as he fled toward the bald mountains of Pignon.

A BLAZING SUN beat down upon the grief-stricken village of Hinche. There was bustle and commotion outside the prison. Fidel was preparing to execute the orders of his superior. There in the dusty road was forming as sorry and pitiable a cavalcade as ever formed under the skies of Africa in the darkest days of slavery.

Men and women filed out the door between two rows of sentinels whose bayonets flashed and sparkled in the sunlight. There were curses and heavy blows as some reeling prisoner staggered toward his place in line. The prisoners formed in two lines facing each other. Handcuffs were brought out and fastened above the elbows, for their hands and wrists were so bony that the cuffs would slip over. Two prisoners were

thus bound together with each set, one link above the elbow of each. A long rope, extending the full length of the line, was securely lashed to each pair of handcuffs so that no two prisoners could escape without dragging the whole line. Many were so weak with hunger and disease that they could not stand without great difficulty. None of them had shoes, and they must walk over many miles of sharp stones and thorns before arriving at Port au Prince. The trip would require many days, and no food was taken except that which was carried in the pouches of the sentries who were to act as guards.

Suddenly there arose a hoarse and mournful cry from assembled relatives, as two soldiers emerged from the barracks, each with a pick and shovel. Fidel knew that most of the prisoners would never see the gates of Port au Prince, and he had made provision.

"Corporal," he said as he passed down the line inspecting each handcuff, "you will bury them where they fall. If they tire out, do not leave them by the roadside."

Weeping friends and relatives surged up to the points of the bayonets begging that they might be allowed to give bread and bananas to the prisoners, for they well knew there was no food between Hinche and the

capital except a few sparse fields of wild sugarcane.

"Back, vermin! Forward, march!" commanded the corporal.

His voice could scarcely be heard for the screams and moans of the relatives as they shrieked:

"Good-bye, papa! Good-bye, brother!"

Down the yellow banks of the Guyamouc wound the cavalcade, into the clear waters many of them would never see again.

Hinche mourned that day, and when the shades of night descended upon the plains there was nought to be heard save the measured beat of the tom-tom and the eery bray of the burros.

SLEEK, WELL-FED Fidel sat calmly smoking with his feet propped up on the very desk vacated by his chief the day before and mused upon the prospect of his captaincy, which he felt confident would be forthcoming. He had carried out the orders of La Falais and he knew that crafty general would not be slow to reward him when news of the desertion of Vilmord reached the capital. He muttered half aloud: "A captain within a month. Not so bad for a man of thirty."

But his face twisted with a frown as he recalled the solemn, almost prophetic words

of Vilmord: "You will never be a captain."

There came a voice from the darkness outside.

"May I enter, *Capitaine?*"

He liked the title, "Captain."

It sounded so appropriate.

"Come in," he commanded.

It was the aged and withered old magistrate of Hinche, who had seen his people maltreated for years and who, no doubt, would have joined the Cacos long before had his age permitted.

"I have come to make a request of you in the name of the citizens," he said, and there was a strange light in his eyes.

"In the name of the citizens!" Fidel repeated sneeringly, and added: "Anything you ask in that august name, no man could refuse. What is it?"

"We beg that you release the remaining prisoners, those who are unable to walk because of hunger and disease, and allow them to return to their homes where they can be cared for. They are dying like hogs in that pesthouse. Will you let them out?"

"Never," was the firm reply. "I will bury every festering Caco-breeder back of the prison with the rest of his kind."

The magistrate folded his arms and with shrill but steady voice cried out: "La Falais, and you too, Fidel, shall render an account before history for this foul action, this heartless tor-

ture, this wanton murder of your own people. We, who are left, have arms, and we shall oppose you to the last drop. This very night has settled upon the fresh graves of our best people. Along the trail to Ennery and Maissade they have died, and over the graves your vicious troopers have put up forked sticks and placed on them a skirt, a shoe, or a hat in derision of the dead. To what purpose did the immortal Dessalines and Petion fight and wrest our liberty from the foreigner when it is snatched from us by our own bloody government?"

"Be careful of your words, old man," replied Fidel. "I have but to command and my soldiers will shoot down every living thing and lay this Caco nest in ashes."

"I have been very busy to-day, *mon capitaine*. Your soldiers at this very moment have scattered among the bereaved families of those who lie dead by your hand. You have no troops — they have become the troops of Haiti."

With a curse Fidel snatched his pistol from the holster. But before he could use it, a half dozen burly blacks leapt from the darkness outside where they had been waiting, and bore him to the floor. His hands were bound behind his back, and two of his own soldiers stood over him with drawn revolvers.

"I'll have the last man of you

court-martialed and shot!" he stormed. "Release me immediately."

"Small fear of that," answered the soldier. "We go to join Benoit, the Caco chief, when we have finished with you."

The magistrate walked to the door and spoke a few whispered words to one of the blacks, who hurried away into the darkness.

EVERY SHACK SENT forth its avenger. Torches flared up, and soon the house was surrounded by a writhing, howling mob, eager for the blood of the man who had sent their loved ones to die on the blistering plains of Maissade, and all because he wanted to be a captain. The soldiers had cast away their uniforms, but their glittering bayonets could be seen flashing in the red torchlight. Wild screams rent the night as the brutishness of the mob will gained ascendancy.

"Let us skin him alive and cover our tom-toms with his hide!" shrieked an old hag as she squirmed through the crowd.

"Let us burn him or bury him alive!" yelled another.

By what magic the old magistrate gained control of that wild multitude, who may say? Standing in the doorway facing the mob, he lifted his withered hand and began: "Countrymen, for ten years I have meted out justice among you. Have I not

always done the proper thing?" "Always," they answered with one voice.

"Then," he continued, "will you not trust me in this hour when the future of Hinche hangs in the balance?"

"Leave it to the magistrate!" someone yelled, and the whole mass took up the cry.

"Norde, do you and Pilar bring along the prisoner. Follow me."

The two designated seized Fidel roughly, lifted him to his feet and preceded by the magistrate, hurried him across the road toward the prison. The mob followed, and the pale light of the torches shone on horrible faces, twisting with anger and deep hatred.

What could the magistrate have in mind?

The procession moved up to the prison door, and as the odors struck Fidel in the face, he drew back with a shudder, his eyes wild and rolling with terror. One torch was thrust inside the door, and its red light threw fantastic shadows over the yellow walls. All the prisoners had been removed, and there was nothing in sight save a mass of rags in a corner at the far end.

"Yonder," said the magistrate, "is Mamon. He died last night. But before we leave you, you must see the face of your bed-fellow." As the mob grasped the intent of the speaker, loud



cheers filled the night: "Leave it to the magistrate! He will do the right thing."

Fidel shivered with fear, not so much the fear of the dead as of the terrible malady which had burned out the life.

Norde pushed the shaking Fidel through the door, and the mob, forgetting the dread disease in their desire to see him suffer, followed him up to the pile of rags.

"Now," said the magistrate, when Fidel's hands were loosed, "uncover the face of your victim."

With trembling fingers Fidel lifted a filthy rag from the face of the corpse. Did human ever look on sight so horrible? The eyes were gone, sunken back into their sockets, leaving but dark and ghastly holes. The tongue was lolling out, black and parched, furrowed as if it had been hacked. Out of the corners of the gaping mouth there oozed a thick and greenish fluid.

The skin was drawn tightly over the cheeks, and the bones had cut through. There was a sparse and needlelike growth of beard standing up straight on the pointed and bony chin.

Fidel dropped the rag and screamed with terror. Norde picked it up, and, with the aid of Pilar, smothered his screams by wrapping it around his head. He hushed presently and when, at length, the rag was removed,

the magistrate commanded: "Uncover that!" and he pointed to the stomach of the corpse. Fidel obeyed.

The stomach was black and flabby like a tire, and the skin had pulled loose from the supporting ribs.

"Here, *mon capitaine*," said the magistrate, "you will live with this dead man until the black dysentery has claimed you."

With a wild shriek Fidel fell fainting across the festering body of Mamon.

The magistrate barked out his commands quickly and sharply.

"Norde, bind him fast where he lies!"

In a moment Fidel was lashed to the fast decomposing body, his hair tied to that of the corpse; and cheek to cheek they left him with the dead.

IT WAS HIGH NOON when a strange cavalcade headed toward Pignon, the lair of the Cacos. The old magistrate was leading. Men, women and children carried their few belongings on their heads. Hinché was deserted.

At the same time there entered Hinché by another trail two horsemen, who, after stopping at the office of Fidel, moved on to the prison. They were Vilnord and Benoit, the Caco chief. The prison door was ajar.

They entered, and what they saw was this — *the dead, cheek to cheek*, slowly sinking into each other.

Outside, Vilmord whispered

to his companion as they mounted their horses, "I told him he would never be a captain"; and they rode away toward the bald mountains of Pignon.

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### In Re: Clark Ashton Smith

Imaginative fiction and poetry is the poorer for the death, a year or so back, of Clark Ashton Smith, whose stories and poems first began to appear in the magazines around 1930. It is to be hoped that Arkham House, which is re-issuing the long out-of-print volume of H. P. Lovecraft's tales "The Outsider", will also re-issue their first two collections of Smith, "Out Of Space And Time", and "Lost Worlds". (The third, "Genius Loci", is still available, we believe.)

The poetry has been less well preserved, a limited edition published in the 30's now being a collector's item. However, Mr. Roy Squires, and Mrs. Clark Aston Smith, are working on what she describes as "the long-projected 'Hill of Dionysus' — love lyrics written by CAS, and selected by him, to form a cycle, hand set, beautifully, by Squires, and now at bindery." There will be a self-portrait in pencil, photostated to slip in more expensive copies — i.e. the "Ltd. Edition" — plus, if it can be managed, a poem, autographed by CAS, for the collector.

The plan is to issue the "Hill Of Dionysus" in various formats which will range from a \$3.75 edition to a very limited \$25.00 edition for collectors. The de luxe edition will include the self portrait, photo, and an original mss., autographed.

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# The Last Dawn

by Frank Lillie Pollock

*Astronomers, etc., may hoot at the premises upon which this story is built, but as a version of the end of the world, "The Last Dawn" has power nonetheless. Originally published in 1907, the descriptions of twentieth century New York, as envisioned for the 30's, are amusing to read; but the descriptions of the apocalyptic appearance of light from the monstrous central sun are far from obsolete. Our thanks to James Blish for reminding us of this little-known tale, originally titled "Finis".*

"I'M GETTING tired," complained Davis, lounging in the window of the Physics Building, "and sleepy. It's after eleven o'clock. This makes the fourth night I've sat up to see your new star, and it'll be the last. Why, the thing was billed to appear three weeks ago."

"Are *you* tired, Miss Wardour?" asked Eastwood, and the girl glanced up with a quick flush and a negative murmur.

Eastwood made the reflection anew that she was certainly painfully shy. She was almost as plain as she was shy, though her hair had an unusual beauty of its own, fine as silk and colored like palest flame.

Probably she had brains; Eastwood had seen her reading some extremely "deep" books, but she seemed to have no amusements, few interests. She worked daily at the Art Stu-

dents' League, and boarded where he did, and he had thus come to ask her with the Davises to watch for the new star from the laboratory windows on the Heights.

"Do you really think that it's worth while to wait any longer, professor?" inquired Mrs. Davis, concealing a yawn.

Eastwood was somewhat annoyed by the continued failure of the star to show itself, and he hated to be called "professor," being only an assistant professor of physics.

"I don't know," he answered somewhat curtly. "This is the twelfth night that I have waited for it. Of course, it would have been a mathematical miracle if astronomers should have solved such a problem exactly, though they've been figuring on it for a quarter of a century."

The new Physics Building of Columbia University was about twelve stories high. The physics laboratory occupied the ninth and tenth floors, with the astronomical rooms above it, an arrangement which would have been impossible before the invention of the oil vibration cushion, which practically isolated the instrument-rooms from the Earth.

Eastwood had arranged a small telescope at the window, and below them spread the illuminated map of Greater New York, sending up a faintly musical roar. All the streets were

crowded, as they had been every night since the fifth of the month, when the great new star, or sun, was expected to come into view.

Some error had been made in the calculations, though, as Eastwood said, astronomers had been figuring on them for twenty-five years.

It was, in fact, nearly forty years since Professor Adolphe Bernier first announced his theory of a limited universe at the International Congress of Sciences in Paris, where it was counted as little more than a masterpiece of imagination.

Professor Bernier did not believe that the universe was infinite. Somewhere, he argued, the universe must have a center, which is the pivot for its revolution.

The moon revolves around the Earth, the planetary system revolves about the sun, the solar system revolves about one of the fixed stars, and this whole system in its turn undoubtedly revolves around some distant point. But this sort of progression must stop somewhere.

Somewhere there must be a central sun, a vast incandescent body which does not move at all. And as a sun is always larger and hotter than its satellites, therefore the body at the center of the universe must be of an immensity and temperature beyond anything known or imagined.

It was objected that this hypothetical body should then be large enough to be visible from Earth, and Professor Bernier replied that some day it undoubtedly would be visible. Its light had simply not yet had time to reach the Earth.

The passage of light from the nearest of the fixed stars is a matter of three years, and there must be many stars so distant that their rays have not yet reached us. The great central sun must be so inconceivably remote that perhaps hundreds, perhaps thousands of years would elapse before its light should burst upon the solar system.

All this was contemptuously classed as "newspaper science," till the extraordinary mathematical revival a little after the middle of the twentieth century afforded the means of verifying it.

Following the new theorems discovered by Professor Burnside, of Princeton, and elaborated by Dr. Tanaka, of Tokyo, astronomers succeeded in calculating the art of the sun's movements through space, and its ratio to the orbit of its satellites. With this as a basis, it was possible to follow the widening circles, the consecutive systems of the heavenly bodies and their rotations.

The theory of Professor Bernier was justified. It was demonstrated that there really was

a gigantic mass of incandescent matter, which, whether the central point of the universe or not, appeared to be without motion.

The weight and distance of this new sun were approximately calculated, and, the speed of light being known, it was an easy matter to reckon when its rays would reach the Earth.

It was then estimated that the approaching rays would arrive at the Earth in twenty-six years, and that was twenty-six years ago. Three weeks had passed since the date when the new heavenly body was expected to become visible, and it had not yet appeared.

POPULAR INTEREST had risen to a high pitch, stimulated by innumerable newspaper and magazine articles, and the streets were nightly thronged with excited crowds armed with opera-glass and star maps, while at every corner a telescope man had planted his tripod instrument at a nickel a look.

Similar scenes were taking place in every civilized city on the globe.

It was generally supposed that the new luminary would appear in size about midway between Venus and the moon. Better informed persons expected something like the sun, and a syndicate quietly leased large areas on the coast of Greenland in anticipation of a great rise in

temperature and a northward movement in population.

Even the business situation was appreciably affected by the public uncertainty and excitement. There was a decline in stocks, and a minor religious sect boldly prophesied the end of the world.

"I've had enough of this," said Davis, looking at his watch again. "Are you ready to go, Grace? By the way, isn't it getting warmer?"

It had been a sharp February day, but the temperature was certainly rising. Water was dripping from the roofs, and from the icicles that fringed the window ledges, as if a warm wave had suddenly arrived.

"What's that light?" suddenly asked Alice Wardour, who was lingering by the open window.

"It must be moonrise," said Eastwood, though the illumination of the horizon was almost like daybreak.

Davis abandoned his intention of leaving, and they watched the east grow pale and flushed till at last a brilliant white disc heaved itself above the horizon.

It resembled the full moon, but as if trebled in luster, and the streets grew almost as light as by day.

"Good heavens, that must be the new star, after all!" said Davis in an awed voice.

"No, it's only the moon. This is the hour and minute for her

rising," answered Eastwood, who had grasped the cause of the phenomenon. "But the new sun must have appeared on the other side of the Earth. Its light is what makes the moon so brilliant. It will rise here just as the sun does, no telling how soon. It must be brighter than was expected — and maybe hotter," he added with a vague uneasiness.

"Isn't it getting very warm in here?" said Mrs. Davis, loosening her jacket. "Couldn't you turn off some of the heat?"

Eastwood turned it all off, for, in spite of the open window, the room was really growing uncomfortably close. But the warmth appeared to come from without; it was like a warm spring evening, and the icicles cornices.

For half an hour they leaned from the windows with but desultory conversation, and below them the streets were black with people and whitened with upturned faces. The brilliant moon rose higher, and the mildness of the night sensibly increased.

It was after midnight when Eastwood first noticed the reddish flush tinging the clouds low in the east, and he pointed it out to his companions.

"That must be it at last," he exclaimed, with a thrill of vibrating excitement at what he was going to see, a cosmic event unprecedented in intensity.

The brightness waxed rapidly.

"By Jove, see it redden!" Davis ejaculated. "It's getting lighter than day — and hot! Whew!"

The whole eastern sky glowed with a deepening pink that extended half round the horizon. Sparrows chirped from the roofs, and it looked as if the disc of the unknown star might at any moment be expected to lift above the Atlantic, but it delayed long.

THE HEAVENS continued to burn with myriad hues, gathering at last to a fiery furnace glow on the sky line.

Mrs. Davis suddenly screamed. An American flag blowing freely from its staff on the roof of the tall building had all at once burst into flame.

Low in the east lay a long streak of intense fire which broadened as they squinted with watering eyes. It was as if the edge of the world had been heated to whiteness.

The brilliant moon faded to a feathery white film in the glare. There was a confused outcry from the observatory overhead, and a crash of something being broken, and as the strange new sunlight fell through the window the onlookers leaped back as if a blast furnace had been opened before them.

The glass cracked and fell inward. Something like the sun, but magnified fifty times in size and hotness, was rising out of

the sea. An iron instrument-table by the window began to smoke with an acrid smell of varnish.

"What the devil is this, Eastwood?" shouted Davis accusingly.

From the streets rose a sudden, enormous wail of fright and pain, the outcry of a million throats at once, and the roar of a stampede followed. The pavements were choked with struggling, panic-stricken people in the fierce glare, and above the din arose the clanging rush of fire-engines and trucks.

Smoke began to rise from several points below Central Park, and two or three church chimies pealed crazily.

The observers from overhead came running down the stairs with a thunderous trampling, for the elevator man had deserted his post.

"Here, we've got to get out of this," shouted Davis, seizing his wife by the arm and hustling her toward the door. "This place'll be an fire directly."

"Hold on. You can't go down into that crush on the street," Eastwood cried, trying to prevent him.

But Davis broke away and raced down the stairs, half carrying his terrified wife. Eastwood got his back against the door in time to prevent Alice from following them.

"There's nothing in this build-

ing that will burn, Miss Wardour," he said as calmly as he could. "We had better stay here for the present. It would be sure death to get involved in that stampede below. Just listen to it."

The crowds on the street seemed to sway to and fro in contending waves, and the cries, curses, and screams came up in a savage chorus.

The heat was already almost blistering to the skin, though they carefully avoided the direct rays, and instruments of glass in the laboratory cracked loudly one by one.

A vast cloud of dark smoke began to rise from the harbor, where the shipping must have caught fire, and something exploded with a terrific report. A few minutes later half a dozen fires broke out in the lower part of the city, rolling up volumes of smoke that faded to a thin mist in the dazzling light.

The great new sun was now fully above the horizon, and the whole east seemed ablaze. The stampede in the streets had quieted all at once, for the survivors had taken refuge in the nearest houses, and the pavements were black with motionless forms of men and women.

"I'll do whatever you say," said Alice, who was deadly pale, but remarkably collected. Even at that moment Eastwood was struck by the splendor of her ethereally brilliant hair that

burned like pale flame above her pallid face. "But we can't stay here, can we?"

"No," replied Eastwood, trying to collect his faculties in the face of this catastrophe revolution of nature. "We'd better go to the basement, I think."

In the basement were deep vaults used for the storage of delicate instruments, and these would afford shelter for a time at least. It occurred to him as he spoke that perhaps temporary safety was the best that any living thing on Earth could hope for.

But he led the way down the well staircase. They had gone down six or seven flights when a gloom seemed to grow upon the air, with a welcome relief.

It seemed almost cool, and the sky had clouded heavily, with the appearance of polished and heated silver.

A deep but distant roaring arose and grew from the southeast, and they stopped on the second landing to look from the window.

A VAST BLACK mass seemed to fill the space between sea and sky, and it was sweeping toward the city, probably from the harbor, Eastwood thought, at a speed that made it visibly grow as they watched it.

"A cyclone — and a waterspout!" muttered Eastwood, appalled.

He might have foreseen it



from the sudden, excessive evaporation and the heating of the air. The gigantic black pillar drove toward them swaying and reeling, and a gale came with it, and a wall of impenetrable mist behind.

As Eastwood watched its progress he saw its cloudy bulk illumined momentarily by a dozen lightning-like flashes, and a moment later, above its roar, came the tremendous detonations of heavy cannon.

The forts and the warships were firing shells to break the waterspout, but the shots seemed to produce no effect. It was the city's last and useless attempt at resistance. A moment later forts and ships alike must have been engulfed.

"Hurry! This building will collapse!" Eastwood shouted.

They rushed down another flight, and heard the crash with which the monster broke over the city. A deluge of water, like the emptying of a reservoir, thundered upon the street, and the water was steaming hot as it fell.

There was a rending crash of falling walls, and in another instant the Physics Building seemed to be twisted around by a powerful hand. The walls blew out, and the whole structure sank in a chaotic mass.

But the tough steel frame was practically unwreckable, and, in fact, the upper portion was simply bent down upon the

lower stories peeling off most of the shell of masonry and stucco.

Eastwood was stunned as he was hurled to the floor, but when he came to himself he was still upon the landing, which was tilted at an alarming angle. A tangled mass of steel rods and beams hung a yard over his head, and a huge steel girder had plunged down perpendicularly from above, smashing everything in its way.

Wreckage choked the well of the staircase, a mass of plaster, bricks, and shattered furniture surrounded him, and he could look out in almost every direction through the rent iron skeleton.

A yard away Alice was sitting up, mechanically wiping the mud and water from her face, and apparently uninjured. Tepid water was pouring through the interstices of the wreck in torrents, though it did not appear to be raining.

A steady, powerful gale had followed the whirlwind, and it brought a little coolness with it. Eastwood inquired perfunctorily of Alice if she were hurt, without being able to feel any degree of interest in the matter. His faculty of sympathy seemed paralyzed.

"I don't know. I thought — I thought that we were all dead!" the girl murmured in a sort of daze. "What was it? Is it all over?"

"I think it's only beginning," Eastwood answered dully.

The gale had brought up more cloud, and the skies were thickly overcast, but shining white-hot. Presently the rain came down in almost scalding floods, and as it fell upon the hissing streets it steamed again into the air.

In three minutes all the world was choked with hot vapor, and from the roar and splash the streets seemed to be running rivers.

The downpour seemed too violent to endure, and after an hour it did cease, while the city reeked with mist. Through the whirling fog Eastwood caught glimpses of ruined buildings, vast heaps of debris, all the wreckage of the greatest city of the twentieth century.

Then the torrents fell again like a cataract, as if the waters of the Earth were shuttlecocking between sea and heaven. With a jarring tremor of the ground a landslide went down into the Hudson.

The atmosphere was like a vapor bath, choking and sickening. The physical agony of respiration aroused Alice from a sort of stupor, and she cried out pitifully that she would die.

The strong wind drove the hot spray and steam through the shattered building till it seemed impossible that human lungs could extract life from the semi-

liquid that had replaced the air, but the two lived.

After hours of this parboiling, the rain slackened, and, as the clouds parted, Eastwood caught a glimpse of a familiar form half way up the heavens. It was the sun, the old sun, looking, small and watery.

But the intense heat and brightness told that the enormous body still blazed behind the clouds. The rain seemed to have ceased definitely, and the hard, shining whiteness of the sky grew rapidly hotter.

The heat of the air increased to an oven-like degree; the mists were dissipated, the clouds licked up, and the earth seemed to dry itself almost immediately. The heat from the two suns beat down simultaneously till it became a monstrous terror, unendurable.

An odor of smoke began to permeate the air; there was a dazzling shimmer, over the streets, and great clouds of mist arose from the bay, but these appeared to evaporate before they could darken the sky.

The piled wreck of the building sheltered the two refugees from the direct rays of the new sun, now almost overhead, but not from the penetrating heat of the air. But the body will endure almost anything, short of tearing asunder, for a time at least; it is the finer mechanism of the nerves that suffers most.

ALICE LAY FACE down among the bricks, gasping and moaning. The blood hammered in Eastwood's brain, and the strangest mirages flickered before his eyes.

Alternately he lapsed into heavy stupors, and awoke to the agony of the day. In his lucid moments he reflected that this could not last long, and tried to remember what degree of heat would cause death.

Within an hour after the drenching rains he was feverishly thirsty, and the skin felt as if peeling from his whole body.

This fever and horror lasted until he forgot that he had ever known another state; but at last the west reddened, and the flaming sun went down. It left the familiar planet high in the heavens, and there was no darkness until the usual hour, though there was a slight lowering of the temperature.

But when night did come it brought life-giving coolness, and though the heat was still intense it seemed temperate by comparison. More than all, the kindly darkness seemed to set a limit to the cataclysmic disorders of the day.

"Ouf! This is heavenly!" said Eastwood, drawing long breaths and feeling mind and body revived in the gloom.

"It won't last long," replied Alice, and her voice sounded extraordinarily calm through the darkness. "The heat will come

again when the new sun rises in a few hours."

"We might find some better place in the meanwhile — a deep cellar — or we might get into the Subway," Eastwood suggested.

"It would be no use. Don't you understand? I have been thinking it all out. After this, the new sun will always shine, and we could not endure it even another day. The wave of heat is passing round the world as it revolves, and in a few hours the whole Earth will be a burnt-up ball. Very likely we are the only people left alive in New York, or perhaps America."

She seemed to have taken the intellectual initiative, and spoke with an assumption of authority that amazed him.

"But there must be others," said Eastwood, after thinking for a moment. "Other people have found sheltered places, or miners, or men underground."

"They would have been drowned by the rain. At any rate, there will be none left alive by tomorrow night.

"Think of it," she went on dreamily. "For a thousand years this wave of fire has been rushing toward us, while life has been going on so happily in the world, so unconscious, that the world was doomed all the time. And now this is the end of life."

"I don't know," Eastwood said slowly. "It may be the end of human life, but there must be

some forms that will survive — some micro-organisms perhaps capable of resisting high temperatures, if nothing higher. The seed of life will be left at any rate, and that is everything. Evolution will begin over again, producing new types to suit the changed conditions. I only wish I could see what creatures will be here in a few thousand years.

"But I can't realize it at all — this thing!" he cried passionately, after a pause. "Is it real? Or have we gone mad? It seems too much like a bad dream."

The rain crashed down again as he spoke, and the earth steamed, though not with the dense reek of the day. For hours the waters roared and splashed against the Earth in hot billows till the streets were foamnig yellow rivers, dammed by the wreck of fallen buildings.

There was a continual rumble as earth and rock slid into the East River, and at last the Brooklyn Bridge collapsed with a thunderous crash and splash that made all Manhattan vibrate. A gigantic billow like a tidal wave swept up the river from its fall.

The downpour slackened and ceased soon after the moon began to shed an obscured but brilliant light through the clouds.

Presently the east commenced to grow luminous, and this time there could be no doubt as to what was coming.

Alice crept closer to the man as the gray light rose upon the watery air.

"Kiss me!" she whispered suddenly, throwing her arms around his neck. He could feel her trembling. "Say you love me. Hold me in your arms. I want you to love me — now — now. There is only an hour."

"Don't be afraid. Try to face it bravely," stammered Eastwood.

"I don't fear it — not death. But I have never lived. I have never had love. I have never felt or known anything. I have always been timid and wretched and afraid — afraid to speak — and I've almost wished for suffering and misery or anything rather than to be stupid and dumb and dead, as I've always been.

"I've never dared to tell anyone what I was, what I wanted. I've been afraid all my life, but I'm not afraid now. I have never lived. I have never been happy, and now we must die together!"

It seemed to Eastwood the cry of the perishing world. He held her in his arms and kissed her wet, tremulous face that was strained to his.

In that terrible desolation his heart turned toward her, and a strange passion intoxicated him as his lips met hers, an intoxication and passion more poignant for the certainty of coming death.

"You must love me — you must!" whispered Alice. "Let us live, a little, at the very last!"

THE TWILIGHT was gone before he knew it. The sky was blue already, with crimson flakes mounting to the zenith, and the heat was growing once more intense.

"This is the end, Alice," said Eastwood, and his voice trembled.

She looked at him, her eyes shining with an unearthly softness and brilliancy, and turned her face to the east.

There, in crimson and orange, flamed the last dawn that human eyes would ever see.

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### When You Have Read This Issue

We should like to hear from you. While all traditions are not entirely desirable, the long-standing tradition of close contact between editors and readers of magazines devoted to the bizarre and the unusual is, we feel, one worth preserving.

We are interested in your opinions on the stories in this issue; that goes without saying. But over and beyond this, we should like to see your suggestions about great classics and fine stories of earlier decades which might be made available to a new generation of readers who have not seen them before. The voracious reader of this type of fiction avidly collects old magazines and anthologies — but these sources are available only to a minority of readers. Those of you who are in the know can serve as associate editors in suggesting possibilities to the editor, who has not read everything and who may not remember everything he has read — even, alas, many stories well worth remembering!

Our scope is broader than that of magazines exclusively devoted to fantasy, to tales of the supernatural, or to shockers. You may be able to suggest categories — or, better still, odd and unusual, bizarre tales which cannot quite be fitted into any category except that of memorability. We'd like to hear about them.

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# The Undying Head

by Mark Twain

*In one of the appendices to "Life On The Mississippi", Samuel Clemens turns his skill in sheer story-telling to Indian legend. You will not find here either the well-known Twain humor, or the well-known bitterness of the latter days; what you will find is the third element which never quite left him, even at the end: charm. The soul of the American Indian glows through this tale of wonder and strangeness.*

IN A REMOTE PART of the North lived a man and his sister, who had never seen a human being. Seldom, if ever, had the man any cause to go from home; for, as his wants demanded food, he had only to go a little distance from the lodge, and there, in some particular spot, place his arrows, with their barbs in the ground. Telling his sister where they had been placed, every morning she

would go in search, and never fail of finding each stuck through the heart of a deer. She had then only to drag them into the lodge and prepare their food. Thus she lived till she attained womanhood, when one day her brother, whose name was Iamo, said to her: "Sister, the time is at hand when you will be ill. Listen to my advice. If you do not, it will probably be the cause of my death. Take

the implements with which we kindle our fires. Go some distance from our lodge and build a separate fire. When you are in want of food, I will tell you where to find it. You must cook for yourself, and I will for myself. When you are ill, do not attempt to come near the lodge, or bring any of the utensils you use. Be sure always to fasten to your belt the implements you need, for you do not know when the time will come. As for myself, I must do the best I can." His sister promised to obey him in all he had said.

Shortly after, her brother had cause to go from home. She was alone in her lodge combing her hair. She had just untied the belt to which the implements were fastened, when suddenly the event to which her brother had alluded occurred. She ran out of the lodge, but in her haste forgot the belt. Afraid to return, she stood for some time thinking. Finally, she decided to enter the lodge and get it. For, thought she, my brother is not at home, and I will stay but a moment to catch hold of it. She went back. Running in suddenly, she caught hold of it, and was coming out when her brother came in sight. He knew what was the matter. "Oh," he said, "did I not tell you to take care? But now you have killed me." She was going on her way, but her brother said to her, "What

can you do there now? The accident has happened. Go in, and stay where you have always stayed. And what will become of you? You have killed me."

He then laid aside his hunting dress and accoutrements, and soon after both his feet began to turn black, so that he could not move. Still he directed his sister where to place the arrows, that she might always have food. The inflammation continued to increase, and had now reached his first rib; and he said, "Sister, my end is near. You must do as I tell you. You see my medicine-sack, and my war-club tied to it. It contains all my medicines, and my war-plumes, and my paints of all colors. As soon as the inflammation reaches my breast, you will take my war-club. It has a sharp point, and you will cut off my head. When it is free from my body, take it, place its neck in the sack, which you must open at one end. Then hang it up in its former place. Do not forget my bow and arrows. One of the last you will take to procure food. The remainder tie in my sack, and then hang it up, so that I can look toward the door. Now and then I will speak to you, but not often." His sister again promised to obey.

In a little time his breast was affected. "Now," said he, "take the club and strike off my head." She was afraid, but he told her

to muster courage. "Strike!" said he, and a smile was on his face. Mustering all her courage, she gave the blow and cut off the head. "Now," said the head, "place me where I told you." And fearfully she obeyed it in all its commands. Retaining its animation, it looked around the lodge as usual, and it would command its sister to go in such places as it thought would procure for her the flesh of different animals she needed. One day the head said: "The time is not distant when I shall be freed from this situation, and I shall have to undergo many sore evils. So the superior manito decrees, and I must bear all patiently." In this situation we must leave the head.

IN A CERTAIN PART of the country was a village inhabited by a numerous and warlike band of Indians. In this village was a family of ten young men — brothers. It was in the spring of the year that the youngest of these blackened his face and fasted. His dreams were propitious. Having ended his fast, he went secretly for his brothers at night, so that none in the village could overhear or find out the direction they intended to go. Though their drum was heard, yet that was a common occurrence. Having ended the usual formalities, he told how favorable his dreams were, and that he had called them together to

know if they would accompany him in a war excursion. They all answered they would. The third brother from the eldest, noted for his oddities, coming up with his war-club when his brother had ceased speaking, jumped up. "Yes," said he, "I will go, and this will be the way I will treat those I am going to fight;" and he struck the post in the center of the lodge, and gave a yell. The others spoke to him saying: "Slow, slow, Mudjikewis! when you are in other people's lodges." So he sat down. Then, in turn, they took the drum, and sang their songs, and closed with a feast. The youngest told them not to whisper their intention to their wives, but secretly to prepare for their journey. They all promised obedience, and Mudjikewis was the first to say so.

The time for their departure drew near. Word was given to assemble on a certain night, when they would depart immediately. Mudjikewis was loud in his demands for his moccasins. Several times his wife asked him the reason. "Besides," said she, "you have a good pair on." "Quick, quick!" said he, "since you must know, — we are going on a war excursion, so be quick." He thus revealed the secret. That night they met and started. The snow was on the ground, and they traveled all night, lest others should follow them. When it was daylight, the



leader took snow and made a ball of it, then tossing it into the air, he said: "It was in this way I saw snow fall in a dream, so that I could not be tracked." And he told them to keep close to each other for fear of losing themselves, as the snow began to fall in very large flakes. Near as they walked, it was with difficulty they could see each other. The snow continued falling all that day and the following night, so it was impossible to track them.

They had now walked for several days, and Mudjikewis was always in the rear. One day, running suddenly forward, he gave the *saw-saw-quan*,<sup>1</sup> and struck a tree with his war-club and it broke into pieces as if struck with lightning. "Brothers," said he, "this will be the way I will serve those we are going to fight." The leader answered, "Slow, slow, Mudjikewis! The one I lead you to is not to be thought of so lightly." Again he fell back and thought to himself: "What! what! Who can this be he is leading us to?" He felt fearful, and was silent. Day after day they traveled on, till they came to an extensive plain, on the borders of which human bones were bleaching in the sun. The leader spoke: "They are the bones of those who have gone before us. None has ever yet returned to tell the

sad tale of their fate." Again Mudjikewis became restless, and, running forward, gave the accustomed yell. Advancing to a large rock which stood above the ground, he struck it, and it fell to pieces. "See, brothers," said he, "thus will I treat those whom we are going to fight." "Still, still!" once more said the leader. "He to whom I am leading you is not to be compared to the rock."

Mudjikewis fell back thoughtful, saying to himself: "I wonder who this can be that he is going to attack;" and he was afraid. Still they continued to see the remains of former warriors, who had been to the place where they were now going, some of whom had retreated as far back as the place where they first saw the bones, beyond which no one had ever escaped. At last they came to a piece of rising ground, from which they plainly distinguished, sleeping on a distant mountain, a mammoth bear.

THE DISTANCE between them was very great, but the size of the animal caused him to be plainly seen. "There" said the leader, "it is he to whom I am leading you. Here our troubles will commence, for he is a *mishemokwa* and a *manito*. It is he who has that we prize so dearly (*i.e.*, *wampum*), to obtain which the warriors whose bones we saw sacrificed their

<sup>1</sup>War-whoop.

lives. You must not be fearful. Be manly. We shall find him asleep." Then the leader went forward and touched the belt around the animal's neck. "This," said he, "is what we must get. It contains the wampum." Then they requested the eldest to try and slip the belt over the bear's head, who appeared to be fast asleep, as he was not in the least disturbed by the attempt to obtain the belt.

All their efforts were in vain, till it came to the one next to the youngest. He tried, and the belt moved nearly over the monster's head, but he could get it no farther. Then the youngest one, and the leader, made his attempt, and succeeded. Placing it on the back of the oldest, he said, "Now we must run," and off they started. When one became fatigued with its weight, another would relieve him. Thus they ran till they had passed the bones of all former warriors, and were some distance beyond, when, looking back, they saw the monster slowly rising. He stood some time before he missed his wampum. Soon they heard his tremendous howl, like distant thunder, slowly filling all the sky; and then they heard him speak and say, "Who can it be that has dared to steal my wampum? Earth is not so large but that I can find them;" and he descended from the hill in pur-

suit. As if convulsed, the earth shook, with every jump he made.

Very soon he approached the party. They, however, kept the belt, exchanging it from one to another, and encouraging each other; but he gained on them fast. "Brothers," said the leader, "has never any one of you, when fasting, dreamed of some friendly spirit who would aid you as a guardian?" A dead silence followed. "Well," said he, "fasting, I dreamed of being in danger of instant death, when I saw a small lodge, with smoke curling from its top. An old man lived in it. I dreamed he helped me, and may it be verified soon," he said, running forward and giving the peculiar yell, and a howl as if the sounds came from the depth of his stomach, and what is called *checaudum*. Getting upon a piece of rising ground, behold! a lodge, with smoke curling from its top, appeared. This gave them all new strength, and they ran forward and entered it.

The leader spoke to the old man who sat in the lodge, saying, "Nemesho, help us. We claim your protection, for the great bear will kill us."

"Sit down and eat, my grandchildren," said the old man. "Who is a great manito?" said he. "There is none but me, but let me look," and he opened the door of the lodge, when lo! at a little distance he saw the en-

raged animal coming on, with slow but powerful leaps. He closed the door. "Yes," said he, "he is indeed a great manito. My grandchildren, you will be the cause of my losing my life. You asked my protection, and I granted it, so now, come what may, I will protect you. When the bear arrives at the door, you must run out of the other door of the lodge." Then putting his hand to the side of the lodge where he sat, he brought out a bag which he opened. Taking out two small black dogs, he placed them before him. "These are the ones I use when I fight," said he; and he commenced patting with both hands the sides of one of them, and he began to swell out, so that he soon filled the lodge by his bulk; and he had great strong teeth.

When he attained his full size he growled, and from that moment, as from instinct, he jumped out at the door and met the bear, who in another leap would have reached the lodge. A terrible combat ensued. The skies rang with the howls of the fierce monsters. The remaining dog soon took the field. The brothers, at the onset, took the advice of the old man, and escaped through the opposite side of the lodge. They had not proceeded far before they heard the dying cry of one of the dogs, and, soon after, of the other.

"Well," said the leader, "the old man will share their fate, so run. He will soon be after us." They started with fresh vigor, for they had received food from the old man; but very soon the bear came in sight, and again was fast gaining upon them. Again the leader asked the brothers if they could do nothing for their safety.

All were silent. The leader, running forward, did as before. "I dreamed," he cried, "that, being in great trouble, an old man helped me who was a manito. We shall soon see his lodge." Taking courage, they still went on. After going a short distance they saw the lodge of the old manito. They entered immediately and claimed his protection, telling him a manito was after them. The old man, setting meat before them, said: "Eat! who is a manito? There is no manito but me. There is none whom I fear;" and the earth trembled as the monster advanced. The old man opened the door and saw him coming. He shut it slowly, and said: "Yes, my grandchildren, you have brought trouble upon me." Procuring his medicine-sack, he took out his small war-clubs of black stone, and told the young men to run through the other side of the lodge. As he handled the clubs, they became very large, and the old man stepped out just as the bear reached the door. Then striking him with

one of the clubs, it broke in pieces; the bear stumbled. Renewing the attempt with the other war-club, that also was broken, but the bear fell senseless. Each blow the old man gave him sounded like a clap of thunder, and the howls of the bear ran along till they filled the heavens.

THE YOUNG MEN had now run some distance, when they looked back. They could see that the bear was recovering from the blows. First he moved his paws, and soon they saw him rise on his feet. The old man shared the fate of the first, for they now heard his cries as he was torn in pieces. Again the monster was in pursuit, and fast overtaking them. Not yet discouraged, the young men kept on their way; but the bear was now so close that the leader once more applied to his brothers, but they could do nothing.

"Well," said he, "my dreams will soon be exhausted. After this I have but one more." He advanced, invoking his guardian spirit to aid him. "Once," said he, "I dreamed that, being sorely pressed, I came to a large lake, on the shore of which was a canoe, partly out of water, having ten paddles all in readiness. Do not fear," he cried, "we shall soon get it." And so it was, even as he had said. Coming to the lake, they saw the canoe with ten paddles, and immedi-

ately they embarked. Scarcely had they reached the center of the lake, when they saw the bear arrive at its borders. Lifting himself on his hind legs, he looked around. Then he waded into the water; then, losing his footing, he turned back, and commenced making the circuit of the lake. Meantime the party remained stationary in the center to watch his movements. He traveled all around, till at last he came to the place whence he started. Then he commenced drinking up the water, and they saw the current fast setting in toward his open mouth. The leader encouraged them to paddle hard for the opposite shore. When only a short distance from the land, the current had increased so much that they were drawn back by it, and all their efforts to reach it were in vain.

Then the leader again spoke, telling them to meet their fates manfully. "Now is the time, Mudjikewis," said he, "to show your prowess. Take courage and sit at the bow of the canoe. When the canoe approaches his mouth, try what effect your club will have on his head." He obeyed, and stood ready to give the blow; while the leader, who steered, directed the canoe for the open mouth of the monster.

Rapidly advancing, they were just about to enter his mouth, when Mudjikewis struck him a tremendous blow on the head,

and gave the *saw-saw-quan*. The bear's limbs doubled under him, and he fell, stunned by the blow. But before Mudjikewis could renew it, the monster disgorged all the water he had drunk, with a force which sent the canoe with great velocity to the opposite shore. Instantly leaving the canoe, again they fled, and on they went till they were completely exhausted. The earth again shook, and soon they saw the monster hard after them. Their spirits dropped, and they felt discouraged. The leader exerted himself, by actions and words, to cheer them up; and once more he asked them if they thought of nothing, or could do nothing for their rescue; and as before, all were silent. "Then," he said, this is the last time I can apply to my guardian spirit. Now, if we do not succeed, our fates are decided." He ran forward, invoking his spirit with great earnestness, and gave the yell. "We shall soon arrive," said he to his brothers, "at the place where my last guardian spirit dwells. In him I place great confidence. Do not, do not be afraid, or your limbs will be fear-bound. We shall soon reach his lodge. Run, run!" he cried.

RETURNING NOW to Iamo, he had passed all the time in the same condition we had left him, the head directing his sister, in order to procure food,

where to place the magic arrows, and speaking at long intervals. One day the sister saw the eyes of the head brighten, as if with pleasure. At last it spoke: "Oh, sister," it said, "in what a pitiful situation you have been the cause of placing me! Soon, very soon, a party of young men will arrive and apply to me for aid, but alas! How can I give what I would have done with so much pleasure? Nevertheless, take two arrows and place them where you have been in the habit of placing the others, and have meat prepared and cooked before they arrive. When you hear them coming and calling on my name, go out and say, 'Alas! it is long ago that an accident befell him. I was the cause of it.' If they still come near, ask them in, and set meat before them. And now you must follow my directions strictly. When the bear is near, go out and meet him. You will take my medicine-sack, bow and arrows, and my head. You must then untie the sack, and spread out before you my paints of all colors, my war-eagle feathers, my tufts of dried hair, and whatever else it contains. As the bear approaches, you will take all these articles, one by one, and say to him, 'This is my deceased brother's paint,' and so on with all the other articles, throwing each of them as far as you can. The virtues contained in them will cause

him to totter, and, to complete his destruction, you will take my head, and that too you will cast as far off as you can, crying aloud, 'See, this is my deceased brother's head!' He will then fall senseless. By the time the young men will have eaten, and you will call them to your assistance. You must then cut the carcass into pieces — yes, into small pieces — and scatter them to the four winds. Unless you do this, he will again revive."

She promised that all should be done as he said. She had only time to prepare the meat, when the voice of the leader was heard calling upon Iamo for aid. The woman went out, and said as her brother had directed. But the war-party, being closely pursued, came up to the lodge. She invited them in, and placed the meat before them. While they were eating, they heard the bear approaching. Untying the medicine-sack and taking the head, she had all in readiness for his approach. When he came up she did as she had been told; and before she had expended the paints and feathers, the bear began to totter, but, still advancing, came close to the woman. Saying as she was commanded, she then took the head, and cast it as far from her as she could. As it rolled along the ground, the blood, excited by the feelings of

the head in this terrible scene, gushed from the nose and mouth. The bear, tottering, soon fell with a tremendous noise. Then she cried for help, and the young men came rushing out, having partially regained their strength and spirits.

Mudjikewis, stepping up, gave a yell and struck him a blow upon the head. This he repeated, till it seemed like a mass of brains, while the others, as quick as possible, cut him into very small pieces, which they then scattered in every direction. While thus employed, happening to look around where they had thrown the meat, wonderful to behold, they saw starting up and running off in every direction small black bears, such as are seen at the present day. The country was soon overspread with these black animals. And it was from this monster that the present race of bear derived their origin.

HAVING THUS overcome their pursuer, they returned to the lodge. In the meantime, the woman, gathering the implements she had used, and the head, placed them again in the sack. But the head did not speak again, probably from its great exertion to overcome the monster.

Having spent so much time and traversed so vast a country

in their flight, the young men gave up the idea of ever returning to their own country, and game being plenty, they determined to remain where they now were. One day they moved off some distance from the lodge for the purpose of hunting, having left the wampum with the woman. They were very successful, and amused themselves, as all young men do when alone, by talking and jesting with each other. One of them spoke and said, "We having all this sport to ourselves, let us go and ask our sister if she will not let us bring the head to this place, as it is still alive. It may be pleased to hear us talk, and be in our company. In the meantime take food to our sister."

They went and requested the head. She told them to take it, and they took it to their hunting-grounds, and tried to amuse it, but only at times did they see its beam with pleasure. One day, while busy in their encampment, they were unexpectedly attacked by unknown Indians. The skirmish was long-contested and bloody; many of their foes were slain, but still they were thirty to one. The young men fought desperately till they were all killed. The attacking party then retreated to a height of ground, to muster their men, and to count the number of missing and slain. One of their young men had stayed away,

and, in endeavoring to overtake them, came to the place where the head was hung up. Seeing that alone retain animation, he eyed it for some time with fear and surprise. However, he took it down and opened the sack, and was much pleased to see the beautiful feathers, one of which he placed on his head.

Starting off, it waved gracefully over him till he reached his party, when he threw down the head and sack, and told them how he had found it, and that the sack was full of paints and feathers. They all looked at the head and made sport of it. Numbers of the young men took the paint and painted themselves, and one of the party took the head by the hair and said:

"Look, you ugly thing, and see your paints on the faces of warriors."

But the feathers were so beautiful that numbers of them also placed them on their heads. Then again they used all kinds of indignity to the head, for which they were in turn repaid by the death of those who had used the feathers. Then the chief commanded them to throw away all except the head. "We will see," said he, "when we get home what we can do with it. We will try to make it shut its eyes."

When they reached their homes they took it to the council lodge and hung it up before

the fire, fastening it with raw-hide soaked, which would shrink and become tightened by the action of the fire. "We will then see," they said, "if we cannot make it shut its eyes."

MEANTIME, FOR several days, the sister had been waiting for the young men to bring back the head; till at last, getting impatient, she went in search of it. The young men she found lying within short distances of each other, dead, and covered with wounds. Various other bodies lay scattered in different directions around them. She searched for the head and sack, but they were nowhere to be found. She raised her voice and wept, and blackened her face. Then she walked in different directions, till she came to the place from whence the head had been taken. Then she found the magic bow and arrows, where the young men, ignorant of their qualities had left them. She thought to herself that she would find her brother's head, and came to a piece of rising ground, and there saw some of his paints and feathers. These she carefully put up, and hung upon the branch of a tree till her return.

At dusk she arrived at the first lodge of a very extensive village. Here she used a charm, common among Indians when they wish to meet with a kind reception. On applying to the

old man and woman of the lodge, she was kindly received. She made known her errand. The old man promised to aid her, and told her the head was hung up before the council fire, and that the chiefs of the village, with their young men, kept watch over it continually. The former are considered as manitoes. She said she only wished to see it, and would be satisfied if she could only get to the door of the lodge. She knew she had not sufficient power to take it by force. "Come with me," said the Indian, "I will take you there."

They went, and they took their seats near the door. The council lodge was filled with warriors, amusing themselves with games, and constantly keeping up a fire to smoke the head, as they said, to make dry meat. They saw the head move, and not knowing what to make of it, one spoke and said "Hal hal It is beginning to feel the effects of the smoke." The sister looked up from the door, and her eyes met those of her brother, and tears rolled down the cheeks of the head. "Well," said the chief, "I thought we would make you do something at last. Look! look at it — shedding tears!" said he to those around him; and they all laughed and passed their jokes upon it. The chief, looking around and observing the woman, after some time said to



the man who came with her: "Who have you got there? I have never seen that woman before in our village."

"Yes," replied the man, "you have seen her. She is a relation of mine, and seldom goes out. She stays at my lodge, and asked me to allow her to come with me to this place." In the center of the lodge sat one of those young men who are always forward and fond of boasting and displaying themselves before others. "Why," said he, "I've seen her often, and it is as to this lodge I go, almost every night, to court her." All the others laughed, and continued their games. The young man did not know he was telling a lie to the woman's advantage, who by that means escaped.

She returned to the man's lodge, and immediately set out for her own country. Coming to the spot where the bodies of her adopted brothers lay, she placed them together, their feet toward the east. Then, taking an axe which she had, she cast it up into the air, crying out, "Brothers, get up from under it, or it will fall on you!" This she repeated three times, and the third time the brothers all rose and stood on their feet.

Mudjikewis commenced rubbing his eyes and stretching himself. "Why," said he, "I have overslept myself." "No, indeed," said one of the others, "do you

not know we were all killed, and that it is our sister who has brought us to life?" The young men took the bodies of their enemies and burned them. Soon after, the woman went to procure wives for them in a distant country, they knew not where; but she returned with ten young women, whom she gave to the ten young men, beginning with the eldest. Mudjikewis stepped to and fro, uneasy lest he should not get the one he liked. But he was not disappointed, for she fell to his lot. And they were well matched, for she was a female magician. They then all moved into a very large lodge, and their sister told them that the women must now take turns in going to her brother's head every night, trying to untie it. They all said they would do so with pleasure. The eldest made the first attempt, and with a rushing noise she fled through the air.

TOWARD DAYLIGHT, she returned. She had been unsuccessful, as she succeeded in untying only one of the knots. All took their turns regularly, and each one succeeded in untying only one knot each time. But when the youngest went, she commenced the work as soon as she reached the lodge; although it had always been occupied, still the Indians never could see any one. For ten nights now the smoke had not

ascended, but filled the lodge and drove them out. This last night they were all driven out, and the young woman carried off the head.

The young people and the sister heard the young woman coming high through the air, and they heard her saying: "Prepare the body of our brother." And as soon as they heard it, they went to a small lodge where the black body of Iamo lay. His sister commenced cutting the neck part, from which the neck had been severed. She cut so deep as to cause it to bleed; and the others who were present, by rubbing the body and applying medicines, expelled the blackness. In the meantime, the one who brought it, by cutting the neck of the head, caused that also to bleed.

As soon as she arrived, they placed that close to the body, and by aid of medicines and various other means, succeeded in restoring Iamo to all his former beauty and manliness. All rejoiced in the happy termination of their troubles, and they had spent some time joyfully together, when Iamo said: "Now I will divide the wampum;" and getting the belt which contained it, he com-

menced with the eldest, giving it in equal portions. But the youngest got the most splendid and beautiful, as the bottom of the belt held the richest and the rarest.

They were told that, since they had all once died, and were restored to life, they were no longer mortal, but spirits, and they were assigned different stations in the invisible world. Only Mudjikewis's place was, however, named. He was to direct the west wind, hence generally called Kebeyun, there to remain forever. They were commanded, as they had it in their power, to do good to the inhabitants of the earth, and, forgetting their sufferings in procuring the wampum, to give all things with a liberal hand. And they were also commanded that it should also be held by them sacred; those grains or shells of the pale hue to be emblematic of peace, while those of the darker hue would lead to evil and war.

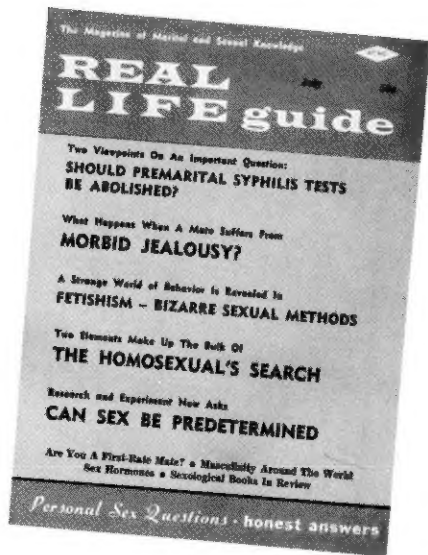
The spirits then, amid songs and shouts, took their flight to their respective abodes on high; while Iamo with his sister Iam-oqua, descended into the depths below.



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